

Introduction

As schools implement comprehensive reform efforts, many are finding the value of juggling the school schedule to provide two important resources for supporting the reform effort: common planning time for teachers, and in elementary schools, literacy blocks (extended time for teaching and practicing reading). Common planning time is valuable for teachers to plan coordinated curricula, engage in informal professional development, review student work, and conduct similar activities. Literacy blocks are valuable for devoting additional time, attention, and in some cases additional staff, to the critical goal of teaching children to read—a foundation skill that will enable their success throughout their educational career.

This publication presents five case studies of elementary and K-8 schools that have reorganized the school schedule to allow for common planning time and literacy blocks. These case studies are intended to provide school principals, teachers, and school leadership teams with examples of approaches to reorganizing the daily schedule. The case study for each school also describes how the school staff came to agreement on revising the schedule; some case studies also provide recommendations from the school staff on navigating the process of reorganizing schedules. The five schools were selected for study because they had chosen varying approaches to revising their schedules. Four of the schools are in Boston, and the fifth is in Cincinnati. Both of these districts are engaged in comprehensive school reform efforts.

Several of the schools have re-arranged the teaching schedules of specialist teachers (e.g., teachers of art, music, and physical education) so that other

teachers may have common planning time. Some of these schools also arranged for common planning time for specialist teachers. All but one of the schools also created daily literacy blocks through their rescheduling.

Common planning time is used for varying purposes in the five schools. At least three of the schools use part of this time for a structured approach to reviewing student work (Dever, Hernandez, and Hurley). At least three schools use the time to plan for implementing the comprehensive school reform model—for example, planning curricular “expeditions” in the Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound model (Hernandez, Hurley, and Clifton). At least one school uses the time for professional development in teaching literacy.

The individual case studies may be found as shown in the table of contents below.

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CASE STUDY:

The Mather Elementary School Boston, MA

Mather School Snapshot

Grades: K-5

Total Student Body: 600

Number of Specialists:

5 (Art, Computers,
Physical Education,
Library, Music)

Literacy Program:

Literacy Collaborative

CSR Model: Core Knowledge

Abstract

For each grade level, the Mather Elementary School incorporated into its schedule at least one double period a week for common planning time. This was achieved by creating a rotating schedule with the full support of the staff.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Common Planning Time

As the schedule on the next page shows, all grade levels except kindergarten have a double period at least one day a week for common planning time. In order to accomplish this, the teachers at the Mather School needed to use their lunch periods for the common planning periods. For example, as shown with shading on the schedule, on Tuesdays second grade teachers have common planning time from 11:10 a.m. until 12:45 p.m. This two-period unit consists of their lunch period (from 11:10-11:55 a.m.) and the period that their classes are with the specialist instructors (12-12:45 p.m.).¹

The major drawback of the current schedule is the inability of specialists to participate with regular education teachers in any of the common planning time periods. While their input would add additional depth to the discussions and curriculum continuity, the specialists' periods are essential in allowing regular teachers to meet for double periods.

Process: Creating the Schedule

In constructing the schedule, the principal at the Mather School was careful to make sure the schedule treated all parties, students, and teachers, fairly. The principal found that teachers generally do not want their planning and development time the first thing in the morning because the flow of morning teaching time is disrupted when students are

immediately sent to specialist instruction upon arrival at school. He also found that most teachers would prefer their planning and development time backed up against their lunchtime.

The major hurdle to implementing the schedule was getting the teachers to shift their paradigm concerning specialist time. It was generally believed at the school that children needed consistency—i.e., that they needed to attend specialist blocks at the same period every day. The fairness of the schedule in terms of planning and development and specialist time, however, tended to convince the teachers to try an alternative.

The schedule has been developed and refined over a number of years. A key step in the process has been the input of the teaching staff. Teacher input has been gathered in a number of ways including year-end questionnaires, staff meetings focused on scheduling, and quick informal consultations during the summer regarding the tentative schedule. Once all policies and concerns have been identified, the principal employs a scheduling consultant to help with the “math” and final details.

Allowing the teachers to have input into scheduling decisions creates support for the schedule. Teacher support is particularly important for a schedule that asks teachers to work beyond the four corners of the teachers' contract by using lunch periods for teacher meetings. As a result of these various inputs, the schedule improves each year.

¹ With five specialists and six grades (K-5), it was necessary to have one grade meet with specialists across the day as opposed to during one class period. This grade would not have the ability to schedule common planning time during the specialist period. Kindergarten was chosen due to teacher dynamics and desires. While it would have been possible to schedule with some minor adjustments, the kindergarten teachers and specialist instructors chose not to have a two-period planning time.



Specialist and Teacher Team Meeting Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:40-8:55 a.m.	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
8:55-9:40 a.m.	<i>Grade 4:</i> Art Computer Gym Library Music – K1	<i>Grade 3:</i> Art – K3 Computer Gym Library Music	<i>Grade 5:</i> Art Computer - K2 Gym Library Music	<i>Grade 1:</i> Art Computer Gym – K5 Library Music	<i>Grade 1:</i> Art Computer Gym Library – K5 Music
9:40-10:25 a.m.		• Specialist Team Meeting		<i>Grade 3:</i> Art Computer Gym – K3 Library Music	<i>Grade 2:</i> Art Computer Gym Library – K4 Music
10:25-11:10 a.m.	<i>Grade 5:</i> Art Computer Gym Library Music – K2	<i>Grade 4:</i> Art – K1 Computer Gym Library Music	<i>Grade 4:</i> Art Computer – K5 Gym Library Music		<i>Grade 3:</i> Art Computer Gym Library – K3 Music
11:10-11:55 a.m. <i>Lunch/ Recess(K,2)</i>	• Kinder Team Meeting		<i>Grade 1:</i> Art Gym Library Music		
12-12:45 p.m. <i>Lunch/ Recess (1,5)</i>	<i>Grade 3:</i> Art Computer Gym Library Music – K3	• 2nd Grade <i>Grade 2:</i> Art – K4 Computer Gym Library Music	• 1st Grade <i>Grade 3:</i> Art Computer – K3 Gym Library Music	<i>Grade 4:</i> Art Computer Gym – K1 Library Music	<i>Grade 4:</i> Art Computer Gym Library – K1 Music • 4th Grade*
12:50-1:35 p.m. <i>Lunch/ Recess (4,3)</i>	<i>Grade 2:</i> Art Computer Gym Library Music – K4	• 5th Grade <i>Grade 5:</i> Art - K2 Computer Gym Library Music	• 3rd Grade Computer – K1	<i>Grade 2:</i> Art Computer Gym – K4 Library Music	• 4th Grade <i>Grade 5:</i> Art Computer Gym Library – K2 Music
1:35-2:20 p.m.	<i>Grade 1:</i> Art Computer Gym Library Music – K5	<i>Grade 1:</i> Art - K5 Computer Gym Library Music	<i>Grade 2:</i> Art Computer – K4 Gym Library Music	<i>Grade 5:</i> Art Computer Gym – K2 Library Music	Assembly 2:00



CASE STUDY:

The Dever Elementary School Boston, MA

Dever School Snapshot

Grades: K-5

Total Student Body: 615

Average Class Size: 26

Literacy Group Size: 15

Literacy Program:

First Steps

CSR model:

Boston's Whole School
Change Model

Abstract

All activity at the Dever Elementary School is centered on its instructional focus, literacy. The faculty has developed a schedule that supports this focus by creating daily extended-literacy blocks, daily 90-minute common planning time for grade-level teaching teams, and opportunities to group students by skill level and need.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Literacy Blocks: All Teachers Teach Literacy

The entire school has a 90-minute literacy block scheduled from 9:30-11 a.m. All teaching staff work in classrooms teaching literacy during this time. Specialists are paired with regular classroom teachers and teach literacy during the literacy block, and as a result are known in the school as the "Literacy Support Team." This pairing gives almost all classes two instructors per classroom during the literacy block. This helps to reduce the class size from 25-28 students per teacher to a reading group size of 12-18 students per teacher. Some specialists have attended literacy training at Lesley University, a local teachers college, during the summer, and all staff have received training for the recently adopted literacy program, First Steps.

Three resource/special education teachers also teach literacy during literacy blocks. They work with varying student populations — special education students, regular education students, or a combination of both. This instruction may take place both in and out of the regular classroom and varies according to student needs.

The school employs subject specialists in five areas: drama/performing arts, science, language enrichment, physical education, and Spanish. In addition, the school employs two instructors who specialize in literacy and teach small groups of students during the literacy blocks. The school uses general funds, Title I and state compensatory education funds for these positions.

In addition to the literacy blocks, all staff are encouraged to teach literacy within the context of other subjects.

Common Planning Time

Each grade has at least 45 minutes of common planning time every day.

This planning time backs up against teacher lunch periods. If teachers choose, they may have 90 minutes of common planning time each day. Typically, two or three times per month teachers choose to use this time to undergo a formal process facilitated by an expert coach called "Looking at Student Work" (LASW) for 90 minutes. The principal did not push this idea on teachers, but simply offered the option for those who were interested. Initially, teachers were skeptical of the concept, but over time this has become a recurring staff-wide activity.

The 45-minute planning periods for school specialists (shown below as the Literacy Support Team) are scheduled each morning before the literacy block begins. In addition, this group meets for 90 minutes once a month for LASW.

Student Group Sizes Vary with Educational Needs

The school recently used a grant from the Annenberg Foundation and Goals 2000 funds to hire substitutes who freed teacher-teams to meet together for a half day and evaluate mid-year student data. The teams brought multiple student



The Dever School Planning and Development Periods

Grade	8:30-9:30	9:30-11:00	11:05-11:50	11:55-12:40	12:45-1:30	1:35-2:20	2:20-2:30
K	Literacy Support Team P&D (specialists)	Literacy Block	Lunch	P&D**			DEAR*
1			Lunch	P&D**			DEAR*
2				Lunch	P&D**		DEAR*
3				Lunch	P&D**		DEAR*
4					Lunch	P&D**	DEAR*
5					Lunch	P&D**	DEAR*

*Drop Everything and Read

**Planning and Development

assessments to the meeting ranging from Stanford 9 and MCAS to reading tests and Light Retention Tests. The team identified students who were falling behind and developed strategies for each student to bring them up-to-speed by the end of the year. Not only did this strategy help inform teachers of potential problems, but it gave them an opportunity to take action with one-half of the school year remaining. This exercise is the basis of the school's Internal Accountability Plan.

As a result, some students are re-grouped according to skill level and receive additional assistance in areas of need.

The Process: Agreeing on the Strategy

After analyzing school data in the '96-'97 school year, the principal and Instructional Leadership Team organized the school into Action Teams to tackle various issues within the school. One Action Team was dedicated to examining time as a resource. This team visited a New York City school (PS 126) that had implemented an innovative schedule to accomplish the school's goals. The team found this visit to be extremely helpful, for they could observe the strategy in action and thus better understand how it is effective. After these visits were completed, the principal and Action Team completed the exercises in the "Resource Review Guide,"² examining their current use of resources.

As a result, they discovered new ways to use existing time, staff, and funds to accomplish certain goals.

The Action Team and the principal discussed both the site visit and the findings from the Resource Review Guide with the entire staff and came up with five options for how to change the schedule. After further discussion, the school chose to implement one of the proposed options on a one-week trial basis during the month of June. This proved to be a non-threatening strategy for teachers, and essential for faculty buy-in. The teachers decided to adopt the new schedule permanently, and worked with the committee to refine it for optimal efficiency. The schedule is now reviewed and refined each year.

Recommendations

- Visit schools that are already trying what you want to accomplish. Seeing is believing.
- Use all available staff to support your instructional focus. Realize this is a challenge, especially for specialists who have not taught literacy in the past. This strategy forces some people to take on new roles and learn new skills. Provide them with the support they need to be effective.
- Set a specific student achievement goal, to be measured by student-achievement data.
- Stop doing everything. Pick one thing and do it extremely well.

² The Resource Review Guide was developed by New American Schools in partnership with the Boston Plan for Excellence to provide schools with a systemic way to analyze their resources (time, money and staff) and identify changes that can support their instructional improvement efforts. The guide is available from the New American Schools District Services program.



CASE STUDY:

The Rafael Hernandez School Boston, MA

Hernandez School Snapshot

Grades: Pre-K through 8

Total Student Body: 400

Average Class Size: 25

Adult to Student Ratio: 1:12

Literacy Group Size:

K-3rd, (5-6) 4th-5th (10-12),
6th-8th (9-10)

Specialists: Music, Computers,
Physical Education, and
Visual Arts

Literacy Program:

Literacy Collaborative

CSR Model:

Expeditionary Learning

Abstract

The Rafael Hernandez School, through the creative use of specialist teachers, has carved out two 90-minute blocks and one 45-minute block of common planning time per week for each teaching team. In addition, with a bilingual approach to education, the Hernandez School places a heavy emphasis on literacy and each grade-level generally schedules a 90-minute literacy block every day. Through the use of trained paraprofessionals, small literacy groups are created within the literacy time blocks.

School Background Information

The Rafael Hernandez School, a pre-K through 8 school, is a bilingual school. All children enrolled are taught in both Spanish and English. Teachers are partnered and alternate teaching the same grade level of students in Spanish and in English. This team teaching approach makes it all the more important that common planning time exist for teachers. Common planning time is also important at the Hernandez School because teachers are grouped into multi-grade level teams: pre-K-1, 2-3, 4-5 and 6-8, and students, except Pre-K and grades 6-8, remain with the same teacher for two years.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Literacy Blocks

Most days each grade-level at the Hernandez School schedules a literacy block of approximately 100 minutes. However, on days when specialists are scheduled in the morning, the literacy blocks are often shorter.

These blocks are generally scheduled in the morning but may shift to another time period due to specialist scheduling.

Shown on the next page is a typical schedule for the 3rd grade. The schedule shows literacy blocks from 9:20-11 a.m. every morning except Tuesday when this time is spent with specialists. On Tuesday, the literacy block runs from 11-11:50 a.m. This time can be cross-referenced to the full-page Specialist Schedule, which appears on page 8.

Small Literacy Groups

Through the use of paraprofessionals during the literacy blocks, the Hernandez School creates small groups to focus on reading. In the Boston Public Schools, any bilingual class with over 18 students must have a paraprofessional. These paraprofessionals are used during the literacy blocks to allow the teacher to intensively focus on smaller groups of children. During the K-3 literacy blocks, these small groups are approximately 5-6 students. For the 4th and 5th grades and the 6th-8th grades the literacy groups are approximately 10-12 students and 9-10 students, respectively.

While the teacher is focusing on one small group of students, the other students in the class are supervised by the paraprofessional and are engaged in activities such as independent writing or computer work. The teacher rotates through the small literacy groups during the course of the literacy block.



Example of Classroom Schedule — 3rd Grade

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:10-9:20	Before School Work*				
9:20-10:15	Reading	Computers	Reading	Reading	Reading
10:15-11:00		Art			
11:00-11:50	Writers' Workshop	Reading	Writers' Workshop	Writers' Workshop	Writers' Workshop
11:50-12:10	Skills Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
12:10-12:50	Lunch & Recess				
12:50-1:45	Math	Math	Math	Music	Math
1:45-2:30	Music	Expeditionary Learning	Expeditionary Learning	Math	Expeditionary Learning
2:30-3:15	Gym			Expedition	
3:15-3:25					

*Before School Work is a period where the students work on homework assignments or independent projects or problems as students are arriving.

To increase the value of the paraprofessionals during the literacy block, the paraprofessionals are encouraged to participate in literacy training classes.

During the literacy block, some of the students may also work with the full-time family literacy specialist, the Title I reading recovery teacher, or literacy volunteers.³

Common Planning Time

By carefully scheduling specialists' time, the Hernandez School has created, for each teaching team, at least two 90-minute blocks and one 45-minute block of common planning time a week.

The specialist schedule for the 1998-99 year on the next page illustrates how this was accomplished. For example, the two 3rd grade classes and the two 2nd grade classes met with specialists in back-to-back periods from 1:45-3:20 p.m. on Monday afternoon, creating a 95-minute block of common planning time for the 2nd and 3rd grade teaching team. The schedule also shows that their additional common planning time fell on Tuesday morning from 9:20-11 a.m. and from 1-1:45 p.m. on Thursday afternoon. (See highlighted areas.)

This common time for teaching teams is used in a variety of ways. At least once a month the time is devoted to a formal process facilitated by an expert coach called "Looking at Student Work." Common planning time is also devoted to implementing components of its whole school plan, including Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, its literacy approach through ELLI, and curriculum development.

Process: Creating the Schedule

The Hernandez School initially constructs approximately five schedules based on the numbers alone (i.e. number of students, grades, time periods). Once these permutations have been completed, the Hernandez School presents these schedules to the teaching staff for input and then incorporates lessons learned from the operation of the current schedule.

During the spring semester, teachers are given the opportunity to comment on the "numbers" schedules proposed for next year. At this time, the teachers can make specific requests. For example, last spring the middle school teachers requested that they be allowed to supervise their respective grades during the designated lunch period. In response, a

³ At the Hernandez School, Special Education teachers are generally not incorporated into the regular classrooms.



Specialist Schedule*

	Specialist	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:20-10:15 a.m.	Music	6A	2A	6B	1A	7
	Gym	6B	2B	7	1B	8
	Computer	7	3A	8	KA	6A
	Visual Art	8	3B	6A	KA	
	Library				PreKA	6B
	Family Lit				PreKB	
10:15-11 a.m.	Music	4A	2B	6B	1B	7
	Gym	4B	2A	7	KA	8
	Computer	5A	3B	8	KB	6A
	Visual Art	5B	3A	6A	PreKA	
	Library				PreKB	6B
	Family Lit				1A	
11-11:45 a.m.	Music	Admin. Period For Specialists				
	Gym					
	Computer					
	Visual Art					
	Library					
	Family Lit					
11:35 a.m.-12:05 p.m.	Specialists Lunch					
12:05-1 p.m.	Music	8	8	6A	7	6A
	Gym	6A	6A	6B	8	6B
	Computer	6B	6B	7	6A	7
	Visual Art	7	7	8	6B	
	Library					8
	Family Lit					
1-1:45 p.m.	Music	Specialist Planning Period	Specialist Planning Period	Specialist Planning Period	3A	Specialist Planning Period
	Gym				3B	
	Computer				2A	
	Visual Art				2B	
	Library					
	Family Lit					
1:45-2:30 p.m.	Music	3A	4A	KA	Specialist Planning Period	5A
	Gym	3B	4B	KB		5B
	Computer	2A	5A	PreKA		4A
	Visual Art	2B	5B	PreKB		
	Library			1A		4B
	Family Lit			1B		
2:30-3:20 p.m.	Music	3B	4B	KB	PreKA	5B
	Gym	3A	5A	1A	PreKB	4A
	Computer	2B	5B	1B	1A	4B
	Visual Art	2A	4A	PreKA	1B	
	Library			PreKB	KA	5A
	Family Lit			KA	KB	



CASE STUDY:

The Hurley Elementary School Boston, MA

Hurley School Snapshot

Grades: K-5

Total Student Body: 365

Average Class Size: 24

Student to Adult
Ratio: 15:1

No. of Specialists: 3.8

Literacy Program:
Literacy Collaborative

CSR Model: Boston Public
School's Whole School
Change Model

Abstract

The Hurley Elementary School is a two-way bilingual school that has re-worked its schedule to achieve two primary goals. They are to:

1. Increase the time for literacy while maintaining the one-hour math-instruction time, and
2. Create blocks of common planning time for comprehensive school reform and "Looking at Student Work".

THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Literacy Blocks for All Grades

Early grades have a literacy block at the beginning of the day, upper grades have this block at the end of the day.

To make this work, the schedule shifted from having three to two lunch periods per day. In addition, the staff eliminated its second-language instruction block and used this time to expand the literacy block to two hours. (Now, students have second language instruction every other week.)

Common Planning Time

Each grade has two one-hour blocks and one two-hour block of common planning time per week (four hours total). The two-hour blocks are shaded on the schedule on page 11.

Lower-grade students meet with specialists in the afternoon (keeps morning literacy block and afternoon common planning time free).

Upper-grade students meet with specialists in the morning (keeps afternoon literacy block and morning common planning time free).

To make this work, the staff needed to solve a problem with the 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m. block of the schedule, the one period of time during the day that is less than one hour. In order to give teachers with planning and development time at that time a full hour for planning, the staff opted to have lunch mothers and paraprofessionals cover those teachers' classes for 15 minutes of the next period (between 12:15 and 12:30 p.m.). These adults bring students from their specialists' classes to their regular classrooms at 2:15 p.m. and monitor a 15-minute period of silent reading while the regular classroom teachers finish their planning period.

The Process: Agreeing on the Strategy

The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) committee on resources tackled this challenge first. With the support of the coach, this team looked at different scheduling scenarios, agreed upon one, and polished it to fit the needs of the school. Next, two staff within the subcommittee submitted their recommendation to the ILT, which accepted it, and eventually presented it to the entire staff. The staff voted to accept the recommendation.



schedule was created which provided two back-to-back administrative periods for each middle school teacher: one administrative period free from duty for his or her own lunch and one period to supervise the middle school students' lunch.

Reviewing what works and what does not work in the current operations of the school is a very important element in creating a new schedule at the Hernandez School. For example, in last year's schedule for the middle school teachers most of Friday was devoted to planning. This arrangement was scrapped for the current year because student discipline problems developed. The Hernandez School found that the specialist teachers, because of their limited time with students, had much less control over student behavior.

In addition, for equitable purposes, each year the schedule is adjusted so different teaching teams have common planning time first thing in the morning. Teachers at the Hernandez School generally feel that specialist time during the first two periods of the day is disruptive to the teaching process for the academic core. So, while the middle school students were spending the first two periods with specialists twice a week in 1998-99 (see the Specialist Schedule), this was expected to change in the next school year.

*There are five specialists at the school, representing 4.4 full-time equivalent positions. Music, Gym, and Computer specialists are full time; the Visual Arts specialist is at the school four days a week; and the Librarian is at school three days a week. The Family Literacy Specialist is paid from Title I funds and is not used in the same manner as the other specialists.



The Hurley School Planning and Development Periods

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:30-10:30 a.m.	Art: P&D Com: P&D PE: P&D Mus: P&D	Art: 4th Com: 4th PE: 4th Mus: P&D	Art: P&D Com: P&D PE: P&D Mus: P&D	Art: 5th Com: ADM. P. PE: 5th Mus: 5th	Art: P&D Com: P&D PE: P&D
10:30-11:30 a.m.	Art: 4th Com: 4th PE: 4th Mus: Lunch	Art: 5th Com: 5th PE: Lunch Mus: 5th	Art: Lunch Com: 3rd PE: 3rd Mus: 3rd	Art: 3rd Com: Lunch PE: 3rd Mus: 3rd	Art: 5th Com: 5th PE: 5th
11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.	Art: Lunch Com: 4th PE: 4th Mus: 4th	Art: 3rd Com: 3rd PE: 3rd Mus: Lunch	Art: 3rd Com: Lunch PE: 3rd Mus: 3rd	Art: 4th Com: 4th PE: Lunch Mus: 4th	Art: 5th Com: 5th PE: 5th
12:15-1:15 p.m.	Art: K Com: 4th PE: K Mus: K	Art: Lunch Com: 1st PE: 1st Mus: 1st	Art: K Com: 1st PE: 3rd Mus: 3rd	Art: K Com: K PE: K Mus: Lunch	Art: Lunch Com: Lunch PE: Lunch
1:15-2:15 p.m.	Art: K Com: K PE: Lunch Mus: K	Art: 1st Com: Lunch PE: 1st Mus: 1st	Art: 1st Com: 1st PE: 1st Mus: Lunch	Art: Lunch Com: 1st PE: 1st Mus: 1st	Art: 2nd Com: 2nd PE: 2nd
2:15-3:15 p.m.	Art: P&D Com: P&D PE: P&D Mus: P&D	Art: P&D Com: P&D PE: P&D Mus: ADM. P.	Art: 2nd Com: 2nd PE: ADM. P. Mus: 2nd	Art: 2nd Com: ADM. P. PE: 2nd Mus: 2nd	Art: 2nd Com: 2nd PE: 2nd

Legend: Com=Computers, Mus=Music, P&D=Planning and Development

Recommendations

- Get people involved early in the process of revising the schedule. This facilitates buy-in for the entire school, and the staff knows that their colleagues have played a major role in the proposal.
- Define goals for how the revised schedule should support the instructional focus before asking the ILT and staff to review the schedule. Make sure there is a strong case for each goal.



CASE STUDY:

Clifton Elementary School Cincinnati, OH

Clifton School Snapshot

Grades: PreK-8

Total Student Body: 300

Average Class Size: 15

Adult to Student
Ratio: 1:10

No. of Specialists: 3.0

Literacy Program:
First Steps

CSR Model:
Expeditionary Learning

Abstract

The Clifton Elementary School, through creative scheduling, has added an hour of instructional time four days a week and carved out five hour-long blocks of common planning time per week. These common planning periods are used for both vertical (multi-grade) and horizontal (single grade) teacher-teams. The additional hour of instructional time allows teachers to spend a minimum of 90 minutes a day on literacy. The literacy program they have adopted, First Steps, was chosen because it complements their new school design, Expeditionary Learning. In addition, the school hired a full-time literacy coach, adopted a new math curriculum, and reduced class sizes to approximately 15.

School Background Information

Clifton Elementary School, a Pre-K through 8 school, was reconstituted for the 1999-2000 school year because of persistently low student achievement. A district team selected the school design, Expeditionary Learning, decided to reduce class size to approximately 15, and selected a new literacy program and new reading and math curricula to complement the design. The redesign also reorganized the school into teams. This makes common planning time especially important at Clifton because teachers are grouped into five vertical (multi-grade) teams, as well as horizontal (grade-level) teams.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Common Planning Time

Through creative scheduling, Clifton was able to add an hour of instructional time four days a week while still providing teachers with five hour-long blocks of planning time per week and early release on Fridays. The four 60-minute blocks from Monday to Thursday are used for vertical teams, and Friday's 55-minute block is used for horizontal teams. The specialists' schedule for the 1999-2000 school year below illustrates how this is accomplished—it shows with shading the Monday-Thursday planning time for one vertical team (grades 5-8) and the Friday planning time for one horizontal team (grade 4).

The vertical teams consist of three K-3 teams, one 4-6 team and one 5-8 team. A team leader heads each team. Students are scheduled for specialist classes on a three-day rotation between Monday and Thursday. Beginning on a Monday, each class

on that team goes to music, art or physical education from 8:30-9:30 a.m., rotating to the other two classes over the next two days. See the leftmost shaded area of the chart for an example of one of the 5-8 team's 60-minute blocks of collaborative planning time. On the fourth day, the rotation starts over again (as indicated by the shaded area in the "Thursday" column). Part of what makes this possible at Clifton is the smaller class sizes. As you can see from the shaded areas between Monday and Thursday, both a 5th grade and a 6th grade classroom share time with the specialist during all of these 60-minute planning periods. This is even more common in the lower grades. On Fridays the schedule is different: horizontal, or grade-level teams are scheduled for 55-minute blocks of collaborative planning time. For example, as indicated by the shaded area in the "Friday" column, the fourth grade teachers have 55 minutes of planning time together between 10:10 and 11:05 a.m. every Friday.



Specialist Schedule*

	Specialist	Monday (Day 1)	Tuesday (Day2)	Wednesday (Day 3)	Thursday (Day 1)	Friday
8-8:30 a.m.	Music	Specialist Planning				Grade 6/7 (8:10-9:05)
	Art					
	PE					
8:30-9 a.m.	Music	5A/6A	7	8	5A/6A	Grade 5/8 (9:10-11:05 a.m.)
	Art	7	8	5A/6A	7	
	PE	8	5A/6A	7	8	
9:35-10:35 a.m.	Music	6B	4A/4B	4C/5B	6B	Grade 4 (10:10-11:05 a.m.)
	Art	4A/4B	4C/5B	6B	4A/4B	
	PE	4C/5B	6B	4A/4B	4C/5B	
10:40-11:10 a.m.	Music	Specialist Planning				Specialist Lunch (11:05-11:35 a.m.)
	Art					
	PE					
11:10-11:40 a.m.	Music	Specialist Lunch				Grade K/1 (11:40 a.m.-12:05 p.m.)
	Art					
	PE					
11:40 a.m.-12:40 p.m.	Music	KA/1A	2C	3A	KA/1A	Grade 2/3 (12:40-1:35 p.m.)
	Art	2C	3A	KA/1A	2C	
	PE	3A	KA/1A	2C	3A	
12:45-1:45 p.m.	Music	1B	2A	3C	1B	Specialist Planning (1:35-2 p.m.)
	Art	2A	3C	1B	2A	
	PE	3C	1B	2A	3C	
1:50-2:50 p.m.	Music	1C	2B	3B	1C	2 p.m. (Dimissal)
	Art	2B	3B	1C	2B	
	PE	3B	1C	2B	3B	

*There are 3.0 specialists at the school. The music, physical education, and art specialists are all full-time.

The common planning time for teacher teams is used in a variety of ways. As we saw above, between Monday and Thursday, planning time is scheduled according to vertical teams. One of these 60-minute blocks is used to develop expeditions for the Expeditionary Learning school design. At least one of these 60-minute blocks is used specifically for literacy; once a week, team members meet with the literacy coach to discuss student work or learn about a new literacy technique to use in their classrooms. Another 60-minute

block is used for team issues such as initiatives involving all the students from the same team. Common planning time is also devoted to looking at promotion standards and ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with those standards. If necessary, sometimes the teachers use one of the planning blocks intended for vertical teams for individual preparations. On Fridays, the horizontal teams use the time to discuss grade-level issues.



Smaller Class Sizes

The district initiative to reduce class sizes to 15 was accomplished through the creative use of many different funding sources. First, some positions found in many schools were eliminated at Clifton, and additional classroom teachers were hired with those resources. For example, most schools in the Cincinnati Public School (CPS) district have instructional assistants, but these positions were eliminated at Clifton in order to free up funding for additional classroom teachers. Similarly, most CPS schools have at least one guidance counselor. At Clifton, a special arrangement was made with the community that enables the school to have 2.4 FTE guidance counselors without using school resources. This school-community partnership helped free up additional resources to hire more classroom teachers. Also, by including 12 special-needs students in the regular classrooms, the school was able to convert one special education teacher with dual licensure into a regular classroom teacher.

A second source of funds that helped pay for additional classroom teachers at Clifton was the federal compensatory education program, Title I. Because so many Clifton students are from low-income backgrounds, the school is eligible to use its Title I funds for schoolwide programs; the salaries of two classroom teachers are paid with Title I funds.

Teachers at Clifton say that smaller classes have many advantages. Among the advantages are the ability to give more personal attention to students, less discipline problems because of better classroom management, and more time spent on task as a result. In addition, having smaller classes has enabled Clifton to schedule blocks of collaborative planning time by having more than one classroom of students attend a specialist's class at the same time.

Expeditionary Learning/New Emphasis on Literacy

Expeditionary Learning was selected for this school for a number of reasons. First, the redesign team wanted to be sure it selected a design with a proven track record for improving student achievement in other schools in the Cincinnati Public School district, and Expeditionary Learning met that criterion. Second, many of its nine design principles meshed

well with the strategic goals of the district, including team-based schools, smaller class sizes, and keeping students with the same teacher until they meet promotion standards. The community members involved in the selection of the design also liked its hands-on approach to learning.

Along with Expeditionary Learning, Clifton adopted First Steps, a literacy program compatible with that school design. Literacy was identified by the school as the number one priority in the first year of redesign, and First Steps has helped the new staff tackle this challenge. Rather than being a prescribed curriculum, First Steps is a continuing professional development program for teachers. It draws on children's strengths, while educating teachers about students' developmental stages and how they learn to read and write, thus helping teachers facilitate students' success in literacy.

To support this literacy program, the district redesign team suggested that the school do without a librarian and instead hire a full-time literacy coordinator. The school followed this advice; the on-site literacy resource person has become integral to the school's progress in improving student reading and writing.

In addition, the extra hour of instructional time four days a week ensures that teachers spend at least 90 minutes on literacy, and sometimes much longer.

New Reading and Math Curricula

To supplement the First Steps literacy program at Clifton, the school has chosen the Harcourt Brace reading curriculum. The combination of the principles and techniques of First Steps and the materials from Harcourt Brace gives teachers a common platform from which to emphasize literacy in their classrooms.

While the focus in the first year of Clifton's redesign is literacy, the school also recognizes the importance of a solid foundation in mathematics. For this reason, the school adopted TERC's Investigations in Number, Data and Space for grades K-5 and Connected Mathematics Projects for grades 6-8. Teachers work to align the curriculum with the promotional standards to ensure that their students are learning to the level of district and state standards.



Process: Creating the Schedule

When Clifton Elementary school was redesigned, the district set goals for the school that included becoming team-based and increasing collaborative planning time. With this in mind, the principal and team leaders created five vertical teams as well as horizontal teams by grade level. They then created a specialist schedule that would give each vertical team four 60-minute collaborative planning periods per week and still allow for one 55-minute block of planning time for grade-level (horizontal) teams on Fridays. This was possible, in part, because of the reduced class sizes at Clifton. By sending more than one classroom of students to one specialist's class at the same time, more classroom teachers can be free for planning without having to hire more specialists.

In addition to managing to schedule approximately five blocks of collaborative planning time, Clifton also added an hour of instructional time four days per week. To partially compensate teachers for this additional time, students are dismissed at 2 p.m. on Fridays, and teachers are free to go once the students are on the buses. Sometimes teachers stay after on Fridays when particular issues come up, but they are officially released one hour early on Fridays to make up for 15 minutes of each extra hour they have to work the other four days. To make up the rest of the time, the four teacher-record days that other schools in Cincinnati use as working days are considered days off for teachers at Clifton. Teachers at Clifton agreed to this schedule because they are committed to helping make the redesign successful.

