Using ESSER Funds for Building Strong Relationships Through Advisory and Lower Teacher Loads
Our Shared Challenge

- Students — especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, and students with disabilities — have experienced months of disrupted learning.

- The unprecedented infusion of federal stimulus funds (ESSER) provides an important opportunity for districts to equitably meet students’ needs and lay the foundation for meaningful, long-term change. With careful planning and investments, leaders can ensure changes are sustainable beyond the three-year ESSER funding period.

"It’s time to redefine what ‘going back to normal’ means and use learnings from the pandemic to innovate and rethink the student learning experience.

-Elementary school dean of students in Minnesota

Source: Educators for Excellence, Voices from the Classroom, 2021
District and school leaders can best navigate ESSER investment decisions by taking a “Do Now, Build Toward” approach — choosing doable starting points for the 2021-22 school year, while designing changes with a long-terms sustainable vision in mind.

This overview lays out a long-term, “Build Toward” vision for key strategies district and school leaders are prioritizing in high schools this fall.

These guides offer a blueprint for organizing resources this school year and beyond.

See the full “Do Now, Build Toward” toolkit.
The Schools Start Here Series

IN THIS SERIES:
How can district and school leaders use stimulus funding to make “Do Now” investments that respond to urgent student needs, center equity, accelerate student learning, and also sustainably “Build Toward” long-term improvement?

IN THIS GUIDE:
What could it look like for my district or school to organize resources to support strong relationships among students and teachers and students’ social-emotional development?
What does the research say?
Students will enter the 21-22 school year with unprecedented social and emotional needs from the COVID-19 pandemic

We don’t yet know the full breadth and depth of social-emotional needs… but early forecasts are stark…

• Only 64 percent of high school students who were in full-time remote classes reported there was “at least one adult at school to talk to” if they are “feeling upset, stressed, or having problems” — 9 percentage points lower than students attending hybrid schooling, and 20 percentage points lower than students back in regular in-person classes.¹

• The pandemic, remote schooling, national grappling with systemic racism, and economic and political instability will all have long-term effects on children’s mental health. For the foreseeable future, educators will have to grapple with a host of additional challenges that will complicate students’ engagement and learning, such as increased anxiety, substance abuse, and hyperactivity — all symptoms of the trauma many students have lived through this past year.²

• Researchers say isolation — like that caused by school closures and quarantining — is leading to a “mental health tsunami.”³

Sources: ¹EdWeek, ²EdWeek, ³The74
Schools and districts can take several approaches to strengthen relationships and social-emotional supports, including **advisory and scheduling for lower teacher loads**.

**Advisory**

Concrete examples of staffing and scheduling models are included in this guide.

**Lower Teacher Loads**

**High-Dosage Tutoring**

See the *Professional Learning & Collaboration for Teachers* guide.

**Counseling**

Not explored in this guide. A number of descriptions are available about school, district, and state efforts to add counseling resources in response to the pandemic.¹

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Sources: ¹EdWeek, Colorado Sun, Chalkbeat, Chalkbeat, Real Clear Policy, The74, The74, Tulsa World, The Hill, AL.com, EdSource
In advisory programs, staff are assigned a small group who meet regularly to build relationships, culture, and social-emotional skills.

What is Advisory?

- Staff are assigned a small group of students to meet with regularly, which creates a consistent and safe space for students to build skills and trust.

- The broad purpose of an “advisory program” is to ensure that each student is known well by at least one adult in the school and can rely on them for support and guidance.

- Advisories can be designed to:
  - Foster stronger adult-student relationships and a stronger sense of belonging and community among students.
  - Develop students’ social-emotional skills.
  - Provide additional post-secondary guidance and support.

- Advisory programs can exist as one of several structures in a school for supporting students in relationship and identity development, alongside other activities such as targeted affinity-based programming and robust extracurricular opportunities.

- Advisory programs, while increasing in popularity, often lack key elements. Effective advisory programs have an intentionally designed curriculum and are accompanied by time for teachers who share students (shared-student teams) and advisors to meet, discuss trends and plan supports.

Many strong high school programs consider advisory a key component of student learning, such as Hillsdale High School in San Mateo, Perspectives Charter School in Chicago, The Springfield Renaissance School, and The Met in Providence as part of the Big Picture Learning model.
Advisory can build relationships, develop social-emotional competencies, and support post-secondary plans — contributing meaningfully to students’ health and success.

There are benefits to prioritizing the areas strengthened by advisory...

**Strong Relationships**
"Students who have at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult are more likely to respond to adversity and succeed. Even students who have been through major traumas, such as refugees from war, show resilience, if they have supportive adults in their lives."¹

**Social-Emotional Development**
In the long run, greater social and emotional competence can increase the likelihood of high school graduation, readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behavior, and engaged citizenship.²

**Post-Secondary Support**
“Ideally, a seminar, advisory, or mentoring structure provides… coaching and support throughout the student’s development and execution of his or her postsecondary plan.”³

Sources: ¹Annenberg, ²Edutopia, ³Educators for Social Responsibility
Lower Teacher Loads

Strategic scheduling and staffing approaches can promote strong relationships and student support.

Depending on priorities, strategic scheduling/staffing can:

**Facilitate Shared-Student Collaboration Among Teachers**
Models in which groups of teachers are assigned to a shared set of students allow teachers to collaborate to plan supports for cohesively.

**Help Maintain Consistent Relationships**
Following students over multiple years can deepen relationships.

**Lighten Teachers’ Loads**
Teachers have fewer students to get to know and to plan supports for.

**Increase the Attention Students’ Receive**
When class sizes are smaller, teachers can provide more individualized support.

**Make the Teaching Job More Manageable**
Strategic scheduling and staffing can enable fewer periods/preps per day, additional release time, and a lower grading load — especially in subjects that have lab-style work (such as science) or intensive feedback on written work (such as ELA or history).
The remainder of this guide is divided into two main parts — providing guidance for investing in (1) advisory, and (2) scheduling and staffing for lower teacher loads.

Go to the **Advisory section**.

Go to the **Lower Teacher Loads section**.
Advisory
Advisory:
How can districts and schools target ESSER dollars now?
To invest sustainably, districts and schools will need to size the full cost of key components of their advisory approach.

- **Dedicated Time for Advisory**
  How do we find sufficient time for advisory? *(Note: typically time is repurposed for advisory without additional costs)*

- **Professional Learning**
  What professional learning opportunities do advisors need to plan and implement effective advisory?

- **Advisor Collaboration/Planning Time**
  What structures for collaboration do educators need for tracking their advisees’ progress and planning for advisory sessions?

- **High-Quality, Aligned Materials**
  What additional materials are needed for advisory?

- **Program Development and Management**
  What investments must be made in developing, managing, and monitoring the advisory program?
Investments in all components of an effective advisory program are strategic and allowable uses for ESSER dollars.

The CARES Act (ESSER I) includes allowable uses of funds related to preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19.

Note that the ‘additional’ LEA allowable uses of funds under the CRRSA Act (ESSER II), such as addressing learning loss, preparing schools for reopening, and testing, repairing, and upgrading projects to improve air quality in school buildings, already are permitted under the CARES Act.

-US Department of Education
**Time for advisory** is typically repurposed without additional investment.

**How do we create sufficient time for advisory?**

Typically, schools integrate advisory into the daily or weekly schedule without additional investments for extended time or additional staff.

See the "**Scheduling & Staffing**" section to explore concrete scheduling examples for integrating advisory.
Staff will need **professional learning** to build the skills of an advisor, and coaching can provide job-embedded support.

### What professional learning opportunities do staff need?

- **Create or adapt and deliver trainings** consistent with the purposes of advisory at your school/district — so staff can, for example, deliver effective social-emotional support, and adapt trauma-informed and restorative justice practices.

- **Consider providing coaching to the advisors** themselves — like at University High School in San Francisco, where advisors have mentors to check in with to experience the value of an advising/mentoring relationship firsthand and feel supported in their work.

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"One of our core principles is that mentors should receive as much support as they are expected to give.

Investing in the well-being and professional needs of our mentors has been transformational for the student and faculty experience, leading to a calmer and healthier school climate.

-Alex Lockett, Dean of University High School"
Shared-student collaboration is key for understanding students’ progress and for planning for consistent advisory experiences.

What collaboration structures and planning time do staff need?

- Invest in regular collaborative planning time for staff who share students (shared-student collaboration). This time can be used to plan advisory together, review student progress, discuss interventions, and connect with families. A key role of an advisor is tracking their advisees’ progress across classes, so meeting in shared-student teams is crucial for sharing information and planning supports.

- Invest in individual planning time for staff to prepare for advisory, coordinate student supports, and connect with advisees and their families.

For more information, see the Professional Learning & Collaboration for Teachers guide.
What social-emotional learning (SEL) materials are needed for strong advisory curriculum?

• Depending on the goals of the advisory program, districts could invest in different forms of curriculum development. Some examples include:
  • Sourcing advisory curriculum materials from third-party expert organizations (including programs studied by the Wallace Foundation).
  • Providing stipends for school-level staff members who have deep expertise to develop materials.
  • Creating centralized advisory curriculum materials at the district level.

• The cost of curriculum will vary depending on whether districts/schools choose formal lesson plans to use during each advisory period or a collection of suggested SEL offerings/ideas advisors can pull from.
Program development & management is needed to provide guidance, materials, and support for implementation.

What roles at the district and in schools will develop and manage advisory programs? How will progress be gauged?

- Consider which combination of roles for managing advisory would be best at the district and school levels:
  - **District program design/support**: Hire or reassign FTE to design and roll out the advisory program, develop guidance, and select curriculum and professional learning opportunities.
  - **External support**: Invest in an external partnership to guide and support design and implementation in the first several years.
  - **School-level experts**: Create a school-based advisory expert role, supported with additional professional development, to support peers in their roles as advisors and to facilitate school-based training.

- Consider whether/how to…
  - Invest in time for staff to **codesign advisory with students and families**.
  - Purchase and implement **climate assessments** — for example, regularly conducting surveys about student well-being.
Advisory: What does strategic scheduling and staffing look like?
Strategic scheduling and staffing for an advisory program requires consideration of **three key decision points**.

**Decision Point #1:**
Determine the **frequency, length, and timing** of advisory periods.

**Decision Point #2:**
Identify which staff you will need to support advisory time based on desired group size.

**Decision Point #3:**
Create **release time** for staff to plan, collaborate, and connect individually with advisees and families.

For examples of scheduling for release time, see the *Professional Learning & Collaboration for Teachers* guide.
Decision Point #1

Determine the frequency, length, and timing of advisory periods.

There are three common options for scheduling advisory:

**Daily Advisory Period**
- Meets each day, establishing a consistent accountability touchpoint.
- Can meet in the morning before first period, at the end of each day, or during a shortened midday period.

**Weekly Advisory Block**
- Meets once weekly for longer — allowing for deeper dives and connection.
- Academic periods are typically shortened to create this additional time once weekly.

**Advisory in “Flex” Block**
- Meets in a rotation with other schoolwide structures, such as a flexible support block. This allows for flexibility in the number of advisory sessions each week.
Options for Scheduling Advisory

Daily Advisory Period

SCHEDULING IMPLICATIONS
Typically, advisory periods are short enough that schools can find a way to reallocate time away from other periods. This may mean:

- Decreasing all class periods by a few minutes to create a new block of time.
- Reducing time spent passing between periods.
- Repurposing existing elective or study hall time

BENEFITS
- Consistent daily schedule, with regular time for check-ins and support.

TRADEOFFS
- Significant investment of time over the week.
- If before first period, students who are consistently late may not experience the support.

EXAMPLE
- See the Springfield Renaissance School
Options for Scheduling Advisory

Weekly Advisory Block

SCHEDULING IMPLICATIONS:
• Academic periods are shortened on advisory day (Friday, for example) to create additional time for advisories to meet for longer than a typical class period.

BENEFITS
• Longer block can allow for deeper conversation/reflection.
• Less time reduction from classes than a daily advisory period.

TRADEOFFS
• Weekly advisory might not provide enough consistent time to build strong community and provide support to students.
Options for Scheduling Advisory

Advisory in “Flex” Block

SCHEDULING IMPLICATIONS

- Schedule a 30-minute schoolwide block every day (in this example, after first period). Here, students have intervention/enrichment 3x/week, and advisory 2x/week.

BENEFITS

- Provides flexibility to increase or decrease the number of advisory periods in the week depending on needs.

TRADEOFFS

- On a standard 7-block day, may need to reduce already-short class length even further.

For more examples of scheduling flexible support blocks that can be used for advisory, see the Targeted Academic Supports guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon, Wed, Fri</th>
<th>Tues, Thurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 1 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 2 (30 min)</td>
<td>Interv. / Enrich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 3 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 4 (120 min)</td>
<td>Class 3 / Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 4</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Decision Point #2

Identify which staff you will need to support advisory time based on desired group size.

- The advisory goals and target group size will drive the **number and type of staff needed to act as advisors:**
  
  - **Teachers and counselors:** Advisory programs that have a stronger focus on academic content — such as college readiness efforts often directed towards students in Grade 12 — may require support primarily from specific staff members, such as core teachers or academic counselors.
  
  - **“All hands on deck”:** For advisory programs focused on building stronger peer relationships, this approach may be used to reduce advisory size as much as possible by including the use of all teachers, administrators, and non-instructional staff, such as counselors, librarians, and paraprofessionals.
  
  - **Cross-age peer mentoring:** If your desired group size is smaller than projected staffing will enable during a single class period, consider integrating effective peer support for a portion of advisory.
  
- **Recommendations on advisory group sizes** vary anywhere from 12 to 22 students. The those that focus on intensive social-emotional support, and/or academic planning and post-secondary advising may aim for group sizes of less than 10 students per advisor.

Sources: ¹Myrick, R.D. et al. (1990), New Visions for Public Schools, Vander Ark et al.
Continued: Decision Point #2

**Identify which staff you will need to support advisory time based on desired group size.**

Additional considerations for staffing advisory:

- Consider **whether advisors will remain with students** for all four years or if they will receive a new group of students each year.

- The **scheduling method might be determined by who serves as advisors**. For example, if a limited set of staff act as advisors, then advisory won’t be a daily schoolwide block — instead, it advisory may take place on different days of the week for each grade level during a flexible block that can be used for tutoring on other days.
Additionally, there are district-level enabling conditions that can either expand or limit the ability of districts and schools to effectively schedule and staff advisory.

**Flexibility**

- Flexible collective bargaining contracts that ensure advisory can be included in standard teacher responsibilities.

- Ability to reallocate time and funding and make scheduling and staffing changes in support of an advisory program.

**District-Provided Structures**

- Curriculum, training, and tools to support advisors in delivering or adapting an advisory curriculum and monitoring its effectiveness over time.

- Prototypes that show how advisory might be included in the school schedule effectively.
Lower Teacher Loads
Strategic scheduling and staffing approaches can promote strong relationships.

Depending on priorities, strategic scheduling/staffing can:

**Facilitate Shared-Student Collaboration Among Teachers**
Models in which groups of teachers are assigned to a shared set of students allow teachers to collaborate to plan supports for cohesively.

**Help Maintain Consistent Relationships**
Following students over multiple years can deepen relationships.

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Strategic scheduling and staffing can enable fewer periods/preps per day, additional release time, and a lower grading load — especially in subjects that have lab-style work (such as science) or intensive feedback on written work (such as ELA or history).
Lower Teacher Loads: What does strategic scheduling and staffing look like?
There are a number of staffing and scheduling strategies to promote stronger relationships and enable student supports — each with various priorities and tradeoffs.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjust teacher assignment</td>
<td>1. Small Learning Communities / “Houses”</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Looping</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly adjust teacher loads in priority grades levels and subjects</td>
<td>3. Lower prioritized class sizes (by increasing in other areas)</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Lower prioritized class sizes (by adding FTE)</td>
<td>Additional FTE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Decrease teacher sections (by adding FTE or increasing class size in other areas)</td>
<td>Neutral or Additional FTE</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjust structure of courses</td>
<td>6. Double-block classes (and/or semester-length courses)</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>7. Interdisciplinary courses</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
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</table>
Strategy #1
Organize into **small learning communities or “houses”** to promote strong connections and coordinated supports for students.

**WHAT IS THIS STRATEGY?**

- **NWREL** defines small learning communities (also known as “houses,” or “schools-within-a-school”) like this: “An interdisciplinary team of teachers shares a few hundred or fewer students in common for instruction, assumes responsibility for their educational progress across years of school, and exercises maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs.”

**BENEFITS**

- Students have a smaller group of peers and teachers to build strong relationships with (“Make teachers and students less anonymous”).
- Teachers share a set of students and can use dedicated collaboration time to coordinate supports.

**EXAMPLE**

- See **Hillsdale High School** in the San Francisco Bay Area.
  - The 300-400 9th-graders are divided into houses of ~110 students each. Each house is assigned four core teachers.
  - The four core teachers share collaboration time to review student progress and coordinate supports. They also serve as advisors to ~28 students each.
  - The house structure is paired with looping, as the houses stay with their teachers for 9th- and 10th-grade.

Sources: EdWeek, KQED, also see Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory study of SLCs in Boston HS
Strategy #2

Looping – when a class of students stays with a teacher for more than one year.

**BENEFITS**

- While much of the research on looping has focused on elementary schools, there is some evidence of positive effects in high school as well, including improved attendance, behavior, and course performance — though there are nuances regarding who benefits and how.  
- Teachers get to know students better and can leverage their knowledge of students to better target instruction and support. And the consistency in relationships helps students feel more known and connected.

**TRADEOFFS**

- Content specialization in some courses may make looping more challenging in some secondary courses, though emerging evidence indicates that the benefits outweighed these challenges.
- Looping can concentrate the effects of an ineffective teacher on a set of students, so equitable assignment practices and support for teachers who are struggling are important accompanying components.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

Looping can be implemented to several different extents:

- Full looping within a small learning community, as seen at Hillsdale High School.
- Loop a subset of core teachers with a cohort (for example, math and ELA teachers loop with students)
- For cross-grade teachers (common at smaller high schools), consider scheduling students with the same teacher across two years.

Sources: 1 Wendoja, Papay, and Kraft (2019), reported in Rockefeller Institute
Strategy #3
To stay cost-neutral, districts and schools can **lower class sizes** in priority areas by increasing them in other areas.

### BENEFITS
- Increase in-class attention for students in prioritized areas.
- Lower teacher load for teachers in prioritized areas (~170 to ~120).
- Can be mostly or fully cost neutral.

### TRADEOFFS
- Increases class sizes in upper grades electives and likely reduces elective options (ex: may stop offering certain elective classes with low enrollment).

### CONSIDERATIONS
- Teachers still have the same planning load (# courses).
- Allows for reduction in prioritized areas without adding FTE. If class size increases need to be phased in, consider the next strategy to add FTE as a bridge to this sustainable method.
- Possible when upper grades electives are small to start, which is commonly the case.

#### Example:
Reduce 9th-grade core classes by increasing upper grades electives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average Core Class Size</th>
<th>Average Elective Class Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
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<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Teacher Assignment:
6 out of 7 periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net FTE change: None</th>
<th>Add FTE in: 9th-grade core and elective</th>
<th>Reduce FTE in: Upper grades elective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Strategy #4
Lower class sizes by **investing in increased FTE.**

**BENEFITS**
- Increase in-class attention for students in prioritized areas.
- Lower teacher load for teachers in prioritized areas (~170 to ~120).

**TRADEOFFS**
- Increases costs for additional FTE, which may not be sustainable without making other tradeoffs. Stimulus funding might enable this method, and costs could be offset later by making targeted class size increases.

**CONSIDERATIONS**
- Teachers still have the same planning load (# courses and preps).

**Example:** Reduce 9th-grade core and elective class sizes by adding FTE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average Core Class Size</th>
<th>Average Elective Class Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Before:**

**After:**

Teacher Assignment: 6 out of 7 periods.

| Net FTE change: Increase | Add FTE in: 9th-grade core and elective | Reduce FTE in: N/A |
Strategy #5

Decrease teacher sections by increasing class sizes in some areas.

**BENEFITS**

- Additional prep time for teachers in prioritized areas for increased collaboration or individual planning.
- Lower teacher load for teachers in prioritized areas (~170 to ~140).

**TRADEOFFS**

- Increases class sizes in upper grades electives and likely reduces elective options (ex: may stop offering certain elective classes with low enrollment).

**CONSIDERATIONS**

- Consider reducing sections in prioritized areas through increasing FTE (the tradeoff here being cost).

**Example:** Reduce the number of sections taught by 9th-grade core teachers by increasing class sizes for upper grades electives.

**Before:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average Core Class Size</th>
<th>Average Elective Class Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>12th</td>
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</table>

**After:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average Core Class Size</th>
<th>Average Elective Class Size</th>
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<td>12th</td>
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<td>28</td>
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</table>

**Teacher Assignment:** 9th-grade teachers teach 5 out of 7 periods. Others teach 6 out of 7 periods.

**Net FTE change:** None

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Add FTE in:</th>
<th>Reduce FTE in:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th-grade core and elective</td>
<td>Upper grades electives</td>
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</table>
Strategy #6

**Block schedules** with semester-long courses can significantly lower teacher loads for each semester.

**BENEFITS**
- Lowers teacher load per semester compared to typical 7-period schedule (~170 to ~85).
- Students have fewer courses to focus on at a time.
- Often happens as longer-block, enabling greater focus/ flexibility in use of time
- Increases length of teacher planning blocks compared to 7-period schedule.

**TRADEOFFS**
- Can be more expensive if teachers are currently teaching a higher percentage of periods than 3 out of 4.
- Doesn’t lower total load over the course of the year
- Can be challenging with end-of-year and AP tests.
- Can mean long-gaps between end of one course + next course in sequence (Ex: Semester 1 2021= Spanish 1, Semester 2 2022= Spanish 2)

**CONSIDERATIONS**
- Consider using stimulus funding to implement while planning other reductions to balance.
- There are many “flavors” of block scheduling that achieve different priorities. See *Unlocking Time* for more options to consider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 1 (90 min)</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 2 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>Class 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch (30 min)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 3 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 3</td>
<td>Class 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 4 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 4</td>
<td>Class 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions (20 min)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Strategy #7

**Interdisciplinary courses** can significantly reduce teacher load and, when done well, engage students in deeper, more relevant work.

### BENEFITS
- Significantly reduces teacher load compared to a typical 7-period schedule.
- Can better integrate literacy instruction into other subjects, increasing the time spent addressing unfinished literacy learning.

### TRADEOFFS
- Requires significant curriculum integration and teacher professional development.
- Potentially more limited pool of teachers with background to teach combined courses.

**Example:** Combined ELA and social studies into a humanities course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before:</th>
<th>Single Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>ELA Class 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>ELA Class 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 5</td>
<td>ELA Class 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 6</td>
<td>ELA Class 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After:</th>
<th>Humanities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>Humanities Class 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
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<td>Period 3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 6</td>
<td>Humanities Class 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher load:** ~170 students

**Teacher load:** ~85 students
Continued: Strategy #7

**Interdisciplinary courses** can significantly reduce teacher load and, when done well, engage students in deeper, more relevant work.

### CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider math/science as a combination course,
- Stimulus funds can be used to support the transition to interdisciplinary courses, with investments such as new curriculum, time for staff to develop materials, and potentially team-teaching courses (for example, a social studies teacher and an ELA content expert teach a course together while developing/piloting an interdisciplinary course).

### EXAMPLES

- Generation Schools (New York)
- City High (Pittsburgh)

### Example

Combined ELA and social studies into a humanities course.

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**Teacher load:** ~170 students

**Teacher load:** ~85 students
Districts and schools can pilot ways to **sustain lowered teacher loads**, even after the ESSER funding window expires.

For now, schools might...

- Add FTE in priority grades (such as 9th-grade) and subject areas (such as ELA) to lower class sizes or number of sections taught.
- Add FTE to team-teach ELA and social studies together (or math and science).

...while piloting and evaluating ways to sustain lower loads, even without stimulus dollars.

- Examine **course-taking patterns and class size data** to identify ways to decrease underutilized offerings and/or increase class size in select areas, such as upper grades electives.
- Pilot ways of offering **specialized electives** virtually or through dual-enrollment to reduce number of small upper grades courses, offsetting class size decreases in prioritized grades.
- Develop **interdisciplinary courses** and train teachers to teach them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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As your team weighs the possible tradeoffs associated with different approaches, makes decisions about how to organize resources, and plans for how to evolve and scale your approaches over time, we encourage you to adapt these guides to meet your unique needs and context.

To share your work or get help navigating your “Do Now, Build Toward” approach, contact us.