Using ESSER funds for Building Strong Relationships through Advisory and Lower Teacher Loads. Students are returning to school with unprecedented social and emotional needs due to the pandemic. Schools will need to strengthen relationships through advisory and scheduling for lower teacher loads to build capacity for educators to connect with students who need additional attention.

We’re offering guidance for districts looking to fund advisory and lower teacher loads sustainably, using ESSER funds to get programs off the ground and to lay the groundwork for long-term change. We also offer concrete examples of staffing examples and scheduling models that you can implement today and adjust along the way to enable continuous improvement over time.
District and school leaders can best navigate ESSER investment decisions by choosing doable starting points for the upcoming school year, while designing changes with a long-term sustainable vision in mind.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

What Does the Research Say?

Advisory

- How to Spend One-Time Funds
- Strategic Scheduling and Staffing
- Lower Teacher Loads
Building Strong Relationships: What Does the Research Say?
Students have **unprecedented social and emotional needs** as a result of 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.

- 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.

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

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.

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

- **Advisory**
- **Lower Teacher Loads**

- **High-Dosage Tutoring**
  - See the *High-Dosage Tutoring* 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

- **Mentoring**
  - Not explored in this guide. See [Aspire Charter Schools](https://www.aspirecharters.com) and the [Georgia Department of Education](https://www.gadoe.org) for examples of how to organize mentoring in response to the pandemic.

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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 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 teacher groups are assigned to a shared set of students allow teachers to collaborate to plan supports 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).

ESSER Guidance: Building Strong Relationships

Sometimes schools make investments in relationships—like adding counselors or support staff—that pull resources away from core instruction, raising class sizes and loads. Lowering teacher loads centers investment on relationships between teachers and students.
Advisory: How to Spend One-Time Funds
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?
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.

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.
Successful advisory is anchored in high-quality materials.

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.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Advisory Period</th>
<th>Weekly Advisory Block</th>
<th>Advisory in “Flex” Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Meets each day, establishing a consistent accountability touchpoint.</td>
<td>• Meets once weekly for longer — allowing for deeper dives and connection.</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can meet in the morning before first period, at the end of each day, or during a shortened midday period.</td>
<td>• Academic periods are typically shortened to create this additional time once weekly.</td>
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</tbody>
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</table>
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 support.

**EXAMPLE**
- See the Springfield Renaissance School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Student A</th>
<th>Teacher A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:05-9:05</td>
<td>Calculus</td>
<td>Calculus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:10-10:10</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Calculus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15-11:15</td>
<td>US History</td>
<td>Planning/Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:20-12:50</td>
<td>Lunch + Study Hall</td>
<td>Lunch/Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:55-1:55</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Pre-Calculus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-3:00</td>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>Pre-Calculus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mon-Thurs</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calculus (55 mins)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Advisory (50 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French (55 mins)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Calculus (45 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US History (55 mins)</td>
<td></td>
<td>French (45 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch (35 mins)</td>
<td></td>
<td>US History (45 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics (55 mins)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch (35 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Lit. (55 mins)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physics (45 mins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English Lit. (45 mins)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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>Period</th>
<th>Mon, Wed, Fri</th>
<th>Tues, Thurs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>Class 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (30 min)</td>
<td>Interv. / Enrich.</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>Class 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (120 min)</td>
<td>Class 3 / Lunch</td>
<td>Class 3 / Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 4</td>
<td>Class 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</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 Grade 12) may require primary support 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 group size as much as possible by including 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.¹ 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.

- 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.

Sources: ¹Myrick, R.D. et al. (1990)., New Visions for Public Schools, Vander Ark et al.
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 teacher groups are assigned to a shared set of students allow teachers to collaborate to plan supports 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).
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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjust teacher assignment</td>
<td>1. Small Learning Communities / “Houses”</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>2. Looping</td>
<td>Resource neutral</td>
<td></td>
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<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>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Lower prioritized class sizes (by adding FTE)</td>
<td>Additional FTE</td>
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<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>
<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>
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<td></td>
<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:
1. *EdWeek, KQED, also see Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory study of SLCs in Boston HS*
Strategy #2
Looping – 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.¹
- 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.¹
- 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: ¹Wendoja, 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 (e.g., 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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>11th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
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**Teacher Assignment:** 6 out of 7 periods.
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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average Core Class Size</th>
<th>Average Elective Class Size</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>9th</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>22</td>
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**Before:**

**After:**

Teacher Assignment: 6 out of 7 periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Average Core Class Size</th>
<th>Average Elective Class Size</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Net FTE change:**

| Increase | Add FTE in: 9th-grade core and elective |
| Reduce FTE in: N/A |

ESSER Guidance: Building Strong Relationships
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 (e.g., 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.

<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Net FTE change:** None
- Add FTE in: 9th-grade core and elective
- Reduce FTE in: Upper grades electives
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 (e.g., Spanish 1 in Semester 1 of 2021, Spanish 2 in Semester 2 of 2022).

**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>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch (30 min)</td>
<td>Class 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 3 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 4 (90 min)</td>
<td>Class 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions (20 min)</td>
<td>Class 8</td>
</tr>
</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 curriculum integration and professional development.
- Smaller pool of teachers with background to teach combined course.

**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).

**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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 3</td>
<td>ELA Class 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 4</td>
<td>ELA Class 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5</td>
<td>ELA Class 5</td>
</tr>
<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>
<td>Humanities Class 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 3</td>
<td>Humanities Class 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 4</td>
<td>Humanities Class 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5</td>
<td>Humanities Class 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 6</td>
<td>Humanities Class 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher load:** ~170 students

**Teacher load:** ~85 students

Examples:
- Generation Schools (New York) and City High (Pittsburgh)
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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To share your work or get help, contact us.

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