

# Here's How

## Leadership guidance for new principals



### #3: How to create a school schedule

You probably didn't become a principal for the joy of creating master schedules—a practice akin to jumbling a bunch of jigsaw puzzles and then fitting the pieces into a cohesive picture. And yet, operations and management are integral to student success. As the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders state, effective principals “institute, manage, and monitor operations and administrative systems that promote the mission and vision of the school.” NAESP's *Pillars, Practices, and Priorities for Effective Principals* confirms that scheduling decisions are inherent in the system optimization that cultivates school culture and empowers people to succeed. When the puzzle pieces align with school goals, children and adults thrive.

#### Getting Started: What and How

Scheduling begins with the needs of the students, followed by facilitating teachers to meet those needs. Leverage scheduling as a tool to reach target goals.

1. Pivot the schedule toward academic priorities. For instance, if literacy is a focus, allot sufficient time for reading and literacy instruction.
2. Think logistically by starting with lunch and recess. In the age of social distancing, avoid putting too many children in one space.
3. Start early, review often—but keep it flexible. The people you greet in the fall—big and little—will look very different from those you said goodbye to in the spring.
4. Design revisions by assessing what worked and didn't work this year. Data can reveal pain points in the school day that scheduling can relieve—for example, separating recess from lunch to reduce peak-time behavior referrals.
5. Seek meaningful input from all stakeholders: the leadership team on student performance and staffing allocations, teachers on their strengths and preferences, parents and kids on the successes and challenges of the school-day structure.
6. Maximize learning opportunities for all students. An equity lens assures access to such resources as peer tutors, staff mentors, parent volunteers, and small-group instruction.
7. Schedule students for specials—art, music, physical education—that provide prep time for homeroom teachers. Create frequent times for teacher grade levels and grade bands to meet for common planning.

#### Research says ...

- Effective principals use school schedules to support inclusive programming for students with disabilities.
- Principals can harness the school's schedule to pursue goals, such as facilitating teacher collaboration with time for common planning or team meetings.
- Limiting teacher responsibilities creates time for them to focus on teaching.

#### Resources

- *Resource Guide for Elementary Master Scheduling* — Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Maryland
- *You're the Principal! Now What?* — Jen Schwanke
- *What Great Principals Do Differently* — Todd Whitaker
- *The Principal: Three Keys to Managing Impact* — Michael Fullan
- *Leading Learning Communities: Pillars, Practices, and Priorities for Effective Principals* — The National Association of Elementary School Principals
- *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* — The National Policy Board for Educational Administration
- *How Principals Affect Students and Schools* — The Wallace Foundation



## Words of wisdom

Part science, part art—scheduling blends mandates with visioning, say veteran principals.

- “Allow the goals and focus of the school and district to dictate scheduling decisions.”—*Howard Fields, assistant superintendent of human resources, Kirkwood School District, Missouri*
- “The schedule has to reflect the values and beliefs of the school. My schedule won’t work in your building, and your schedule won’t work in my building.”—*Michael Chirochello, consultant, Leadership Matters LLC*
- “You are governed by state guidelines that have the exact number of minutes or the period required for each content area. Language arts, science, math—make sure you have those exact minutes.”—*Denise Michelle Gamble, education consultant, NAESP Race and Equity Task Force member*
- “Make a schedule flow throughout the day so kids can be a part of the things they want to be a part of, the things they value.”—*Christopher Bailey, principal, Clack Middle School, Abilene, Texas*
- “The priority should be collaborative planning time for teachers. If you don’t plan it and put it in the schedule, it won’t happen.”—*Shauna Kauffman, principal, Arnold Elementary School, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Annapolis, Maryland*

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## Keys to success

Collaboration, school improvement, equity—all are accomplished through scheduling.

- Infuse scheduling with purpose.
- Know and understand contractual requirements.
- Employ the PSEL standards of equity and cultural responsiveness, and community of care and support for students.
- Make scheduling a key element in optimizing systems through talent and resource management.



## Putting kids first: 5 steps

Strong scheduling processes embrace the needs of students.

1. Create a timeline. Allow time for stakeholder conversations, gathering data, drafting, finalizing, and the inevitable revisions.
2. Prioritize instructional groups. Collect teacher input and data to analyze effectiveness of existing school programs.
3. Create groupings and assign teachers to align strengths with student needs.
4. Build an infrastructure around nonnegotiable and mandatory instruction, plus common planning time.
5. Follow district, Title I, and other requirements to balance class sizes. Monitor year-round to prevent class-size creep.

