SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Creating a Master Schedule

Scheduling is a foundation component of system infrastructure. The needs of the student population must drive intentional scheduling. Master schedules must ensure that *all* students have access to high-quality core instruction and protected time for additional support needed to perform at or above grade level.

Key Considerations:

Coherent classroom schedules are dependent on a well-planned master schedule. Leaders must prioritize several elements when building a master schedule. Uninterrupted blocks of core instruction should be intentionally planned and protected to ensure all students receive high-quality, grade-level instruction. Schedules must also include dedicated time for student supports including tiered intervention for students with learning gaps, enrichment for advanced learners, and support services for students with identified needs. To prevent the unintentional disruption of instruction, schools should strategically stagger blocks of core instruction and student supports in order to maximize the impact of support staff throughout the school day.

Additionally, master schedules must include dedicated time for educators to hold data meetings, collaborative planning, etc., while respecting required unencumbered time.

Information to Gather Prior to Schedule Creation

In order to make the schedule building process as comprehensive and accurate as possible, leaders must collect all information pertinent to student needs, staff capacity, and the logistical operations of the school in advance. Items to consider include:

- District/school goals, based on data.
- Time constraints: beginning/ending of instructional day, state/district required instructional minutes per subject, early release, unencumbered teacher time, required physical education minutes, etc.
- Logistical requirements for moving the entire student body through shared spaces (lunchroom, playground, gym, etc.)
- Number of homerooms/sections per grade level.
- Quantity of students per grade level who will need support services (intervention, enrichment, speech, OT/PT, special education services, etc.)

- Number of support staff, the grade level(s) they support, and their availability (are they only on campus on certain days, only morning or afternoon, etc.) Resource mapping will identify which resources must be shared across grade levels.

- Expectations for embedded grade level and/or departmental collaboration (frequency and duration of data meetings and professional learning) and unincumbered teacher time

Creating the Schedule

To keep the process efficient, effective, and aligned with district/school goals, leadership must prioritize primary elements to add to the schedule. These primary elements should directly support the achievement of district/school goals. All other considerations will be secondary.

Scheduling recommendations vary based on the structure of the school day. For that reason, guidance for creating schedules differs for elementary and secondary schools. This guidance, along with sample schedules, can be found in the following companion documents:

- Master Schedule Guidance (Elementary)

- Master Schedule Guidance (Secondary)

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Master Schedule

Once created, the individual elements of a master schedule are intrinsically linked to one another. It is often difficult to change one element of a schedule without disrupting numerous other elements of the schedule. For that reason, once a schedule is created, it should be tested in multiple ways:

- Are minimum-required minutes satisfied?

- Does the master schedule allow a smooth daily schedule for all stakeholders? (Examine it through the lens of a classroom teacher, a support staff member pulling groups of students from various grade levels, a student with multiple needs for support throughout the school day, etc.)

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