SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Master Schedule Guidance (Secondary)

System leaders should take a whole-school approach to creating master schedules. Because secondary schools serve larger student bodies and are departmentalized, scheduling is more complex. Time and structures must be embedded to support students with learning gaps.

Key Scheduling Considerations

At the secondary level, it is best to think about instructional time in terms of hours per year per subject. No one schedule model is best, but planning teams should intentionally choose the model that is best for their school's needs and priorities. Spending more time on high-quality instruction results in more learning. SC law mandates a 190-day school year with at least 180 instructional days (1,080 hours). Schools should determine the period length in various models, based on the parameters of their school calendar and the length of the school day. If a school moves from seven 52-minute periods to eight 44-minute periods, students in each course would lose 27 days of instruction over the course of the year (Levinson and James, 2023). However, more time doesn't necessarily mean more learning. Teams should carefully examine and clearly understand South Carolina Board of Education (SBE) Regulation 43-234 which lists requirements for public high school students to graduate with a South Carolina High School Diploma before beginning the scheduling process.

Schedule Option	Explained	Assumed Period Length	Hours per Year (per Course)
Four Period A/B Block	Students take 4 classes on "A-Day" and a separate set of 4 classes on "B-Day". Courses run full length of the school year (electives exception).	90 minutes	135
Five Period Trimester	Fall-Winter-Spring, 12-13 weeks long, students take approx. 5 classes each trimester	72 minutes	144
Six-Period Traditional	Students take 6 classes at the same time every day, thru length of school year (electives exception)	59 minutes	177
Seven-Period Traditional	Students take 7 classes at the same time every day, thru length of school year (electives exception)	50 minutes	150
Eight-Period Traditional	Students take 8 classes at the same time every day, thru length of school year (electives exception)	43 minutes	129

Adapted from: *It's Time for Strategic Scheduling* (Levenson and James, 2023)

There are benefits and drawbacks to each schedule model. Consider these factors when choosing the schedule that is the best fit for your system.

	Traditional Six-, Seven-, or Eight-Period Schedules	The A/B Block Schedule	Trimester Block Schedule
When it's a good choice:	• **Simplicity** and **consistency** • **External partnerships-** easy to coordinate internships, community college courses, service opportunities, etc. • Accommodating a high number **of shared or part-time teachers** • **Maximizing core** instructional time • Offering a **high number of singleton courses**- the greater number of slots available, greater **flexibility** for the scheduler.	• A lot of time for **varied instruction** (and greater depth) • **Maximizing** daily time on **instruction** (reduced transitions) • **Minimizing the number of classes** *students and teachers* have on any given day.	• **Long (but not too long)** blocks of instruction • Maximizing course **variety** • **Minimizing the number of classes** students and teachers have each day
When it might not be best for you:	• Having many periods can be **draining**. • Shorter periods may **limit instructional methods** (teachers can only do so much in a 42 min period) • More periods result in **more time lost in transition** (and transitions can be challenging for many students)	• A 90-minute block for **intervention or advisory** is a lot. (Instead, **schedule as skinny classes**) • Student absence results in significant missed instruction**. Schools with high rates of absenteeism might "think twice" about block schedules.** • **Adjusting to the block takes effort.** (significant training, coaching and planning opportunities needed)	• **Reduced instructional time** per class • **Learning gap** between trimesters

Adapted from: *It's Time for Strategic Scheduling* (Levenson and James, 2023)

Timeline for Creating a Schedule

Leadership teams should recognize the time that must be dedicated to this project. It is recommended that tasks such as those seen below are added to the MTSS Leadership Timeline.

Example:

- October – establish scheduling team
- November – establish scheduling priorities
- December – create course catalog
- January – student course selections
- February/March – estimate the number of students needing intervention
- April – make budgeting and staff decisions in order to meet student needs
- July – finalize schedule

Intentionally Plan Intervention in the Master Schedule

Concentrated or even double doses of instruction in foundational classes can help fill academic gaps and move students forward better prepared for upper-level classes (Bunner, 2024). While teachers can help some students catch up on grade-level material during select parts of core classes, other students will still need targeted extra time learning. Students who need targeted intervention or tutoring like this will need additional time built into their schedule (LA DOE, 2024). It is recommended that intervention focuses on reading, writing, and math, intervening with one subject at a time. Systems could create courses based on the level and type of need or offer intervention as a "skinny" period in block schedules, dovetailing it with a second "skinny" period to fill the 90-minute block (Levenson and James, 2023). Out of respect for the time of educators and students, create a course code and make intervention courses credit-bearing (Levenson and James, 2023).

Managing Low-Enrollment Courses

To support student engagement and excitement while simultaneously meeting credit requirements, leadership teams should be responsive to student choices. Reduce low-enrollment courses without reducing student choice. (Levenson, 2023)

- Alternate course offerings by quarter, semester or year
- Combine similar courses or levels of the same subject (Accounting 1 and 2)
- Offer independent studies
- Switch some electives to extracurricular clubs or to remote
- Specialize courses to heighten student engagement:
  Art: Animation Workshop, Art Design in Theatre, Art History, Calligraphy, Ceramics
  Music: Guitar, Intro to Pop Music, Music Production, World Music
  Health & PE: Nutrition, Personal Fitness, Stress Management, Yoga, Weightlifting
  STEM: Challenge Math, Astronomy, Myth Busters, Robotics

Sample Schedules

Sample 1: *High school schedule with seven classes and 54-minute lunch and intervention period*

Period	Regular Schedule	Activity Schedule	Early Release Schedule
1	8:35 – 9:23	8:35 – 9:14	8:35 – 9:12
2	9:28 – 10:16	9:19 – 9:58	9:17 – 9:54
3	10:21 – 11:09	10:03 – 10:42	9:59 – 10:36
4	11:14 – 12:02	10:47 – 11:26	10:41 – 11:18
Anchor Hour Office Hours A Office Hours B	**12:02 – 12:56** 12:02 – 12:26 12:32 – 12:56	**11:26 – 12:23** 11:26 – 11:53 11:56 – 12:23	**11:18 – 12:14** 11:18 – 11:44 11:48 – 12:14
5	12:56 – 1:44	12:23 – 1:02	12:14 – 12:51
6	1:49 – 2:37	1:07 – 1:46	12:56 – 1:33
7	2:42 – 3:30	1:51 – 2:30	1:38 – 2:15

Source: Durrance, S. (2023). *Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies*.

Sample 2: *High school block schedule with four lunches and WIN intervention/enrichment block*

A Block	7:27-8:45 (78 minutes)
WIN Block	8:49-9:20 (31 minutes)
B Block	9:24 – 10:42 (78 minutes)
C Block	10:46-12:28 (78 minutes + 24 min for rotating lunch)
D Block	12:32 - 1:50 pm (78 minutes)

Source: Durrance, S. (2023). *Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies*.

As researched and recorded by Samantha Durrance from the Comprehensive Center Network, Belton-Honea Path High School in South Carolina undertook an immense effort involving other local high schools and the community in order to rearrange its master schedule and create a block of time for intervention. Belton-Honea Path could not do this alone because its school schedule impacted students' ability to attend classes at the career center shared by four high schools, three of which are in a different district entirely. Together, the schools and the career center made changes and each high school adopted a 40- to 45-minute intervention period. The schedules used by the four schools follow (Durrance, 2025).

Sample 3: *High school block schedule with a 40- to 45-minute intervention period four days per week and early release on the fifth day for teacher planning (Three lunch periods)*

Mon, Tues, Thurs, Fri: Flex/WIN

1st Block	*8:00-9:25*
2nd Block	*9:30-10:55*
Flex	*11:00-11:45*
3rd Block & Lunch	*11:50-1:45*
1st lunch	*11:55-12:25*
2nd lunch	*12:30-1:00*
3rd lunch	*1:05-1:35*
4th Block	*1:50-3:15*

Wednesdays: Early Release

1st Block	*8:00-9:25*
2nd Block	*9:30-10:55*
3rd Block & Lunch	*11:00-1:00*
1st lunch	*11:05-11:35*
2nd lunch	*11:40-12:10*
3rd lunch	*12:15-12:45*
4th Block	*1:05-2:30*

Source: Durrance, S. (2025). Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Strategies from Research and the Field *Adapted from Belton-Honea Path High School's Bell Schedule, Palmetto High School's Bell Schedule 2022-23, and Powdersville High School's 2022-23 Bell Schedule*

References:

Bunner, t. (2024). *Master Scheduling for MTSS: Options and Challenges*. Branching Minds. Retrieved from: https://www.branchingminds.com/blog/master-scheduling-mtss-options-challenges

Durrance, Samantha. (2023). *Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Challenges and Strategies*. Comprehensive Center Network. Retrieved from: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED681796.pdf

Durrance, Samantha. (2025). *Implementing MTSS in Secondary Schools: Strategies from Research and the Field*. Comprehensive Center Network. Retrieved from: https://serve.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/MTSS-Strategies-and-Resources-Reference-Updates_Final_2.2025.pdf

Levenson, N. and James, D. (2023). *It's Time for Strategic Scheduling: How to Design Smarter K–12 Schedules That Are Great for Students, Staff, and the Budget*. ASCD.

Louisiana Department of Education (2024). *Maximize Efficiency: Unlocking Effective Middle School Schedules through Smart Staffing*. Retrieved from: https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/school-system-support/maximize-efficiency---unlocking-effective-middle-school-schedules-through-smart-staffing.pdf

Louisiana Department of Education (2024). *Maximize Efficiency: Unlocking Effective High School Schedules through Smart Staffing*. Retrieved from: https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/school-system-support/maximize-efficiency---unlocking-effective-high-school-schedules-through-smart-staffing.pdf

MTSS Center, AIR. (2022). *School Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms Tip Sheet: Schedule*. Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports. Retrieved from: https://mtss4success.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/MTSS_Schedules.pdf

SWIFT Education Center. (2017). *Master scheduling tool*. https://swiftschools.org/docs/swift-master-scheduling-tool/