EAB

Flexible High School Scheduling Models

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Use flexible scheduling models to prepare students for college and/or the workforce. Administrators at all profiled schools operate a version of 'flex-mod' scheduling. In this model, class period schedules vary from course to course, and teachers select the duration and frequency of class periods. This model provides students unstructured time ('off-mod' time) to receive personalized academic support, pursue extracurricular opportunities, or complete homework assignments. Contacts at all profiled schools describe that this flexible scheduling structure helps students develop time management and personal organization skills that benefit them after graduation.

Communicate clear space-related parameters for students' unstructured time. Profiled schools establish options for students during unstructured time based largely on available space. For example, due to staffing and space limitations, students at **School A** must stay in the classroom from their previous period for unstructured off-mod time. In contrast, administrators at **School B** and **School E** designed their buildings for flex-mod scheduling, so students can use all types of flexible space throughout the day. Flexible spaces at School E and School B include facilities for large group lectures, small group discussions, and individual work.

Oversee unstructured time for students who need additional support to teach them to manage time efficiently. Administrators at **School A** and **School B** provide different degrees of independence to students during unstructured time, depending on factors such as academic performance and grade level. At School A, students must maintain satisfactory academic performance to access independent work time. Teachers can assign low-performing students to structured support opportunities during off-mod time. Students earn back their independent work time once their academic performance improves. At School B, administrators provide more opportunities for independence as students progress through high school.

Offer professional development to teachers during scheduling model transition. Most teachers at profiled schools supported shifts to new scheduling models, but some teachers expressed apprehension initially. Administrators at **School E** combat teacher apprehension through monthly meetings for new teachers that address the mechanics of the flex-mod scheduling model. At **School B**, administrators provided opportunities for apprehensive teachers to discuss their concerns with teachers from schools that use similar scheduling models.

2) Flexible Schedule Model Structure

Background

Flex-Mod Scheduling Can Broaden Students' Educational Opportunities

All profiled schools use a version of flexible-modular (flex-mod) scheduling to maximize flexibility for students. Flex-mod scheduling divides the school day into a large number of short 'mods,' as opposed to fewer, long class periods (e.g., 21 20-minute mods instead of eight 45-minute periods).

Teachers can schedule class sessions for as many mods as they would like each day within a given range, as long as they meet a required threshold for class time per week. For example, **School E** uses 21 20-minute mods over the course of each day, with most classes scheduled for two or three mods at a time. Each class must meet for 11 formal in-classroom mods over the course of the week. Administrators also are exploring ways to include online mods in the required 11 weekly course mods.

In the flex-mod model, students typically do not meet with every class every day. Instead, teachers schedule a combination of large group lectures, small group discussions, and time for independent work over the course of the week. Students' time outside of class for independent work is known as 'off-mod' time. In this way, this model mimics the collegiate academic environment, where students meet with instructors less frequently and engage in more self-directed learning. In addition, students often do not have a formal lunch period in this model, but can access the cafeteria whenever they have off-mod time in the middle of the day.

Administrators at profiled schools also note that flex-mod scheduling enables students to take additional courses across an academic year and more easily avoid course timing conflicts. At **School B**, students can use their off-mod time to take any additional courses that fit into their schedules during these blocks of time. In addition, if two classes overlap by only a few mods over the course of the week, teachers typically allow students to enroll and make up the work missed in a small number of mods during off-mod time. To navigate overlapping classes, teachers at School E use lecture-capture technology to help students make up missed material.

Stagger Implementation across Grade Levels If Necessary

While all profiled schools implemented flex-mod scheduling across the entire school, some contacts report that small-scale implementation is feasible. Administrators at **School D** believe that small-scale implementation of flexible scheduling would operate most efficiently by implementing the new model for a single grade level. While challenges with cross-grade courses remain, contacts think that grade-specific models could maintain organization across a school without one uniform model across all grades.

Sample Flex-Mod Schedule Model Template (with Blocked Out Off-Mod Time)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Course 1	*Off-Mod*	Course 1	*Off-Mod*	*Off-Mod*
				Course 5
Off-Mod	Course 6	*Off-Mod*	Course 1	
Course 2		Course 2		Course 1
Course 3	Course 4	Course 3	Course 5	*Off-Mod*
	Off-Mod			
Course 4		*Off-Mod*	*Off-Mod*	Course 6
Off-Mod				*Off-Mod*
Course 5	Course 3			
		Course 5	Course 3	Course 3
Course 6	Course 2	*Off-Mod*	Course 2	Course 4
Off-Mod	*Off-Mod*		Course 6	Course 2
	Course 5	Course 4		
			Course 4	
				Off-Mod

Implement Flexible Schedule Models to Increase Students' College and Career Readiness

Administrators at all profiled schools implemented flexible schedule models to increase students' success after graduation in either the workforce or in postsecondary education. Contacts at **School B** report that flexible schedule models increase student independence and self-reliance, which help students develop time management and organizational skills that will benefit them in future educational and professional settings.

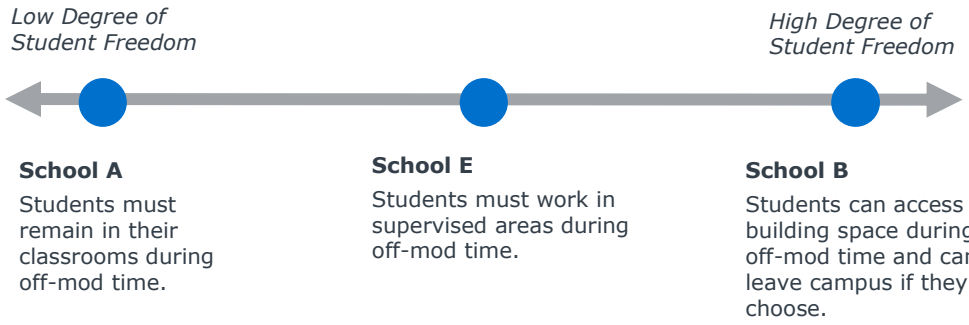
Beyond post-graduation benefits, administrators at **School C** appreciate the flexible scheduling model's open resource time. This resource time enables students to access either enrichment or remediation opportunities.

Provide an Array of Opportunities for Students to Maximize Value of Off-Mod Time

Profiled schools offer students varying degrees of independence during off-mod time. At **School A**, students must remain in the classroom from their previous class for off-mod time, unless teachers assign students to specialized academic support classrooms. However, within the traditional classroom setting, teachers do not provide additional instruction to students remaining in the classroom for off-mod time. Students use this time to complete assignments for other courses as needed. Administrators at this school used to allow students to work independently at various locations throughout the school building, but space and supervisory constraints led administrators to limit the areas where students could work during off-mod time.

In contrast, students at **School B** can use the full school building during off-mod time. Students at School B can leave campus if needed to run errands, pursue extracurricular activities, or gain professional experience. Administrators at School B describe that one student on the golf team uses his off-mod time to practice at the local driving range when he does not have other academic assignments to complete. Within the building, students can access academic support services, work in small groups, or work independently during off-mod time.

Representative Spectrum of Off-Mod Student Freedom at Profiled Schools



Align Student Safety Policies with Policies for Student Use of Off-Mod Time

Due to **School B**'s high degree of student freedom during off-mod time, administrators train students on how to take personal responsibility in the event of an emergency or safety drill. In contrast, students at **School E** must work in a staff-supervised location during off-mod time, so the supervising staff members can manage student safety in the event of an emergency. In the middle of this policy spectrum, students at **School C** can work in unsupervised areas during off-mod time, but security staff members monitor all student work areas using security cameras. These cameras allow staff members to account for all students in the case of an emergency.

Tailor Facilities to Accommodate Flexible Scheduling Needs and Maximize Student Benefits

Administrators at **School B** and **School E** designed their school facilities with flex-mod scheduling in mind. These schools include spaces specifically designed for large groups, small group work, and individual work. These facilities often include furniture and movable walls that enable classrooms to adapt to shifting needs across the course of a school week.

Administrators at these two schools encourage repurposing school spaces to maximize the benefits of flex-mod scheduling for teachers. Administrators at School B leverage the school's auditorium to house large group lectures that reach all sections of a given course simultaneously. Individual teachers will then lead breakout sessions to provide more nuanced instruction and support to students at other times each week.

Administrators at **School C** did not design the school building for flex-mod scheduling. Instead, they repurpose existing spaces to fit varying student and teacher needs. Specifically, administrators repurposed the school's health classroom into a student lounge that students can access during their off-mod time. Health classes now meet in the gymnasium or in another unoccupied classroom.

3) Flexible Schedule Model Support Systems

Academic Support Systems

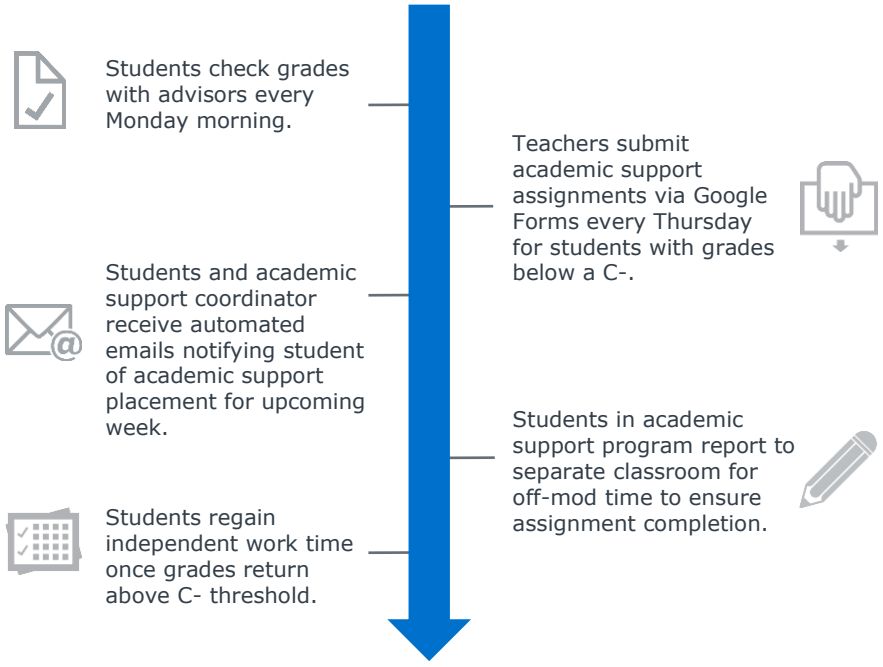
Leverage Student Off-Mod Time to Increase Access to Academic Support Systems

Administrators at all profiled schools describe that students often use off-mod time to access academic support services, such as school-provided tutors or one-on-one meetings with teachers. Administrators report that while most students use their off-mod time responsibly, some students need additional guidance to ensure that they use this time effectively.

For example, at **School A**, administrators assign students to guided academic support centers during off-mod time if their grades fall below a certain threshold. As soon as their grades improve, students regain independent use of their off-mod time. This system embeds support that students may not access on their own.

Administrators at School A emphasize the importance of regular grade checks for both students and teachers to make this enforced support model work effectively. Teachers need to input student grades and report grades to students quickly so that students have up-to-date information about their academic performance and can work to maintain their off-mod independence.

Off-Mod Academic Support Assignment Process at *School A*



Increase Students' Independence between Grade Levels

Several profiled schools limit younger students' access to fully independent work time to guard against potential mismanagement by less mature students. For example, administrators at **School D** assign ninth graders to work in one of the school's four supervised resource areas during their off-mod time to teach students how to use this time effectively. Administrators provide older students with more choice during off-mod time. Similarly, administrators at **School B** only allow students in upper grades

to leave campus during the school day (provided these students meet academic performance and attendance expectations). Students at **School C** gradually increase their amount of independent work time, with seventh graders allotted about 80 minutes of off-mod time per day and seniors allotted up to 200 minutes of off-mod time per day. This policy gives upper-grade students at School C much more off-mod time than students at other profiled schools. Furthermore, students in grades seven through nine at School C must remain in their classrooms during off-mod time. Students in grades 10-12 who maintain at least a C average and do not have any major attendance or behavioral violations can work anywhere throughout the building.

Examples of Graduated Independence Policies at Profiled Schools

School B

Open campus opportunities only available to students in upper grades who meet academic and attendance requirements.

School C

Only students in upper grades who meet academic, attendance, and behavioral requirements can work anywhere in the building during off-mod time.

School D

During off-mod time, ninth graders must work in one of four supervised academic resource areas. Students in upper grades can work independently throughout the building.

Incorporate Student-Facing Technologies to Guide Independent Work Time

Educators at all profiled schools value the role of technology to keep students connected to their teachers on days when classes do not formally meet. At **School A**, all students have personal computers. Teachers use Google Classroom applications to support student learning outside of the classroom. Contacts believe that while a flex-mod schedule would be possible without 1:1 computing, it would be challenging for teachers to coordinate out-of-class work for students without regular computer access.

In contrast, contacts at **School B** and **School E** believe that schools can implement flex-mod scheduling without 1:1 computing, but do acknowledge its value for out-of-class coordination. Contacts at School B also use Google Classroom for out-of-class student-teacher coordination. Contacts at School E used flex-mod scheduling successfully before later incorporating 1:1 computing. These contacts report that computing systems to support the actual scheduling process are ultimately more important than student-facing computing systems. Administrators at School E note that student computer access can enable schools to work around space limitations and still implement flex-mod scheduling.

Key Features of Google Classroom, as used by *School A* and *School B*[1]

Administrators at **School C** rely on administrative staff members to manage student scheduling. Rather than using vendor-provided scheduling software to manage student schedules, administrative staff input all student courses in Microsoft Outlook, which gives students simple access to their schedules.

Stakeholder Support

Provide Teachers with Model-Specific Professional Development for New Schedule Models

No administrators faced issues with teacher union contracts in their school's schedule model implementation process. However, administrators at all profiled schools supported teachers through the schedule model change, remaining cognizant of how this shift impacts teacher workflow. For example, in a more flexible schedule model, teachers may need to plan for class sessions of differing durations across the course of a week.

Science teachers at **School A** were skeptical of flex-mod scheduling because of the unique strain that the new model placed on them. They believed that flex-mod schedules would limit the time available for time-intensive lab sessions. In addition, flex-mod scheduling means that each section of a given class is at a different point in the curriculum over the course of a week. Science teachers worried about preparing and deconstructing the same lab activity several times per week, whereas in a traditional model, all sections could complete the activity on the same day.

Administrators approached teacher support in different manners, such as through regular training sessions held at **School C** and **School E**. The principal at School C leads discussions about the new schedule model at weekly staff meetings.

[1] Google Classroom. *Google*. https://edu.google.com/k-12-solutions/classroom/?modal_active=none.

Experienced teachers at School E lead monthly professional development sessions for new teachers about working in a flex-mod schedule. Administrators appreciate that teachers lead these sessions because it encourages collaboration across the school's teachers.

Administrators at **School B** involved teachers early in the schedule model implementation process. They asked teachers for input about schedule model preferences. Because teacher priorities and requests aligned with the core components of flex-mod scheduling, administrators found this early opportunity for feedback valuable for building teacher support.

Teacher Support Programs at Profiled Schools

Ongoing Coaching

Administrators at **School A** expanded teacher support programs after initial schedule model implementation, so that teachers can base troubleshooting on firsthand experience.

Phased Implementation

Administrators at **School D** phased in the new scheduling model over time to help teachers ease into new model with administrator coaching.

Teacher-Led Skill Development

Experienced teachers at **School E** lead monthly professional development sessions for new teachers to increase understanding of teaching in a flexible schedule model.

Administrators provided opportunities for teachers to visit other schools with similar schedule models to increase support for new schedule models at their own schools. For example, teachers at both **School B** and **School C** collaborated with educators at other schools that had successfully implemented desired schedule models.

Involve Parents Early in the Schedule Model Change Process to Ensure Broad Support

Across profiled schools, parents were generally enthusiastic about transitions to more flexible scheduling models, but administrators nonetheless educated parents about impending changes. Administrators report that parents responded positively to the college and career readiness benefits of flexible scheduling models.

Parents at **School A** supported the new model largely due to its benefits for low-income students. The schedule change provides students with more time outside of school for employment opportunities and increased access to academic supports during normal school hours.

Leaders at School C recommend hosting an open parent meeting to solicit feedback for the new model and give parents a voice in the change process. To gather feedback moving forward, administrators at School C will administer quarterly surveys to parents and students. Administrators will analyze survey results internally and present key findings to the local school board.

Administrators at **School A** held a parent meeting at the end of the school year before implementing the new scheduling model and found this meeting valuable for gaining parent support. The school's principal led this meeting, with support from teachers especially involved in the schedule model implementation process.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

1. What types of blended learning models have contact districts already implemented?
2. Why did contact districts choose to implement blended learning models?
3. How prevalent are blended learning models in contact districts?
4. How do contact districts ensure broad accessibility for blended learning opportunities?
5. Do contact districts ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in blended learning courses by graduation?
6. How do blended learning models differ between subject areas?
7. How do contact districts incorporate intervention strategies into blended learning models?
8. What types of technology do contact districts integrate into blended learning models?
9. How do contact districts manage the space constraints caused by an increased number of students working outside of traditional classroom spaces?
10. Can students at contact districts with release time for blended learning courses enroll in other courses during that time?
11. How do contact districts ensure the safety of students working outside of traditional classroom space?
12. Do contact districts expand (and/or limit) course capacity for blended learning courses?
13. How do contact districts gain teacher buy-in for blended learning models?
14. How do contact districts align blended learning models with teacher union contracts and related agreements?
15. What professional development opportunities do contact districts offer to teachers participating in blended learning models?
16. How do contact districts communicate messages about blended learning expansion to school community stakeholders?

Project Sources

Elementary/Secondary information System (2016). *National Center for Education Statistics*. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/.

Google Classroom. *Google*. https://edu.google.com/k-12-solutions/classroom/?modal_active=none.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators managing innovative scheduling models at public high schools across the United States.

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Enrollment
School A	South	450
School B	Midwest	810
School C	Midwest	60
School D	Midwest	1,070
School E	Midwest	1,310