



# Integrated Academic Support Time

for High School Schedules

# District Leadership Forum

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# 1) Executive Overview

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## Key Observations

**Implement weekly support periods to incorporate advising and academic intervention opportunities into students' regular schedules.** **School B, School C, and School E** use short, specialized periods during the standard school week so that students can access academic support services without the barriers associated with access before or after school (e.g., transportation limitations, job requirements). At School E, administrators give students a 60-minute lunch period broken into two halves. Students can meet with teachers during either half of the lunch period. Administrators require students with low grades to attend these support sessions, while the sessions remain optional for students with higher grades. School C's schedule includes 45-minute academic support periods twice per week. Students can use this time to make up exams or receive additional help in challenging classes. These academic support opportunities can function inside of any traditional schedule model—including both modified block schedule models and models incorporating zero-hour courses.

**Administrators at School B, School C, and School E express that teachers support schedule model changes due to examples of how these shifts help students improve their academic performance.** Administrators at **School E** provide teachers with ongoing opportunities for feedback as well as an end of the year survey to gather teachers' thoughts on schedule model changes. Though teachers lose part of their lunch period at School E, administrators report that teachers do not mind this change because it decreases the chances that they need to stay after school to help struggling students. Administrators at **School B** explain that teachers recognize the value of the school's modified block schedule model in decreasing student stress. Specifically, teachers understand that the model decreases stress by providing more time between classes throughout the week.

**Provide additional oversight during academic support time for students with greatest needs.** At **School E**, students who repeatedly miss their assigned academic support sessions must attend special sessions managed by school administrators during the same lunch period. While these students can still access other teachers for support during this time, they must first check in with the managing administrator. This model provides additional accountability to the existing academic support model and helps ensure that students in greatest need of support access the services that they need instead of skipping these sessions entirely.

**Develop zero-hour options to provide students with academic enrichment opportunities and additional schedule flexibility, but remain aware of equity-related drawbacks.** At **School C**, students can access additional classes during the school's zero hour, which begins an hour before the traditional school day. During this time, students can take regular courses to increase flexibility elsewhere in their schedules. Often, as administrators at **School A** describe, students participate in zero-hour courses to enable them to take time-intensive music courses elsewhere in their schedules. While these opportunities increase student schedule flexibility, administrators at **School B** chose to eliminate the school's zero-hour program due to equity-related concerns. Administrators understand that only students who can provide their own early-morning transportation can access zero-hour courses.

## 2) Schedule Models Overview

### Structure

#### Profiled Schools Use Hybrid Schedule Models to Incorporate Zero Hours and Advisory Periods

Profiled schools operate either modified block schedule models and/or incorporate zero-hour opportunities for students. Administrators at profiled schools operate these models to integrate time for academic support and advisory within the school day.

#### Schedule Model Overview at Profiled Schools

School	Schedule Model Details
<b>School A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 daily periods of 47 minutes each</li><li>• Daily 45-minute zero-hour course (reserved for jazz band)</li><li>• Daily 25-minute advisory period</li></ul>
<b>School B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 periods of 49 minutes each three days per week</li><li>• 4 blocks of 88 minutes each once per week</li><li>• 3 blocks of 87 minutes each with a 25-minute advisory period and a 58-minute academic support period once per week</li></ul>
<b>School C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 daily periods of 58 minutes each</li><li>• Daily 55-minute, zero-hour course</li><li>• Twice-weekly, 45-minute academic support period</li></ul>
<b>School D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rotating block schedule with 8 courses over 6 daily blocks of 59 minutes each</li><li>• Students rotate through 8 courses with each course meeting four times per week</li><li>• Daily 40-minute, zero-hour course</li></ul>
<b>School E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 daily periods of 55 minutes each</li><li>• Daily 55-minute, zero-hour course</li><li>• Weekly 30-minute advisory period</li><li>• Daily academic support period during 60-minute lunch period</li></ul>

#### Implement Modified Block Schedules to Decrease Demands on Students throughout the Weekly Schedule

Modified block schedules blend typical block schedule models with facets of traditional six to eight-period daily schedules. While structures vary, schools using modified block schedules will often have four-block schedules two or three days per week and six to eight-period schedules two or three days per week. Half of a student's courses meet on each block schedule day, meaning that all courses meet four times per week.

This model offers the benefits of both block and period schedules. Teachers have a few longer class sessions each week to dive deeper into course material but do not have to plan for four, 90-minute class sessions each week. Administrators at **School D** report that students benefit from extended block class sessions, which provide more time for group projects, class discussions, and similarly dynamic pedagogical strategies.

In addition, administrators at **School B** express that a modified block schedule improves student and teacher wellness by providing a respite from the fast pace of a

typical school week. Specifically, these administrators describe that the mid-week block schedule days mean that students and teachers have an extra day to prepare for classes, because they do not meet five days per week. Research also notes the high staffing costs that can be associated with block schedule models.<sup>1</sup> Thus, modified block schedule models help schools achieve the benefits of block schedules without the total costs of a full block schedule model.

### Modified Block Schedule Model Template

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Course 1	Course 1	Course 1	Course 5	Course 1
Course 2	Course 2			Course 2
Course 3	Course 3	Course 2	Course 6	Course 3
Course 4	Course 4			Course 4
Course 5	Course 5	Course 3	Course 7	Course 5
Course 6	Course 6			Course 6
Course 7	Course 7	Course 4	Course 8	Course 7
Course 8	Course 8			Course 8

### Offer Zero-Hour Courses to Increase Schedule Flexibility but Consider Equity-Related Limitations

Typically, schools offer zero-hour courses to students to increase flexibility within the standard schedule model. Zero-hour courses provide students the opportunity to enroll in an additional course that meets prior to the start of the regular school day. For example, most students at **School A** and **School C** use zero-hour courses to create time in their daily schedules for time-intensive music courses. Administrators at School C do experience issues with student attrition in zero-hour courses. According to these contacts, because students believe that they can just take these courses in later semesters within the standard school day, they do not feel compelled to maintain consistent attendance in the zero-hour options for these courses.

While these academic opportunities can be valuable, administrators at **School B** caution against using zero-hour courses to solve all students' academic schedule constraints. These administrators used to offer students zero-hour courses but ended this program due to equity-related concerns. Specifically, administrators acknowledge that zero-hour courses are only accessible to students who can provide their own transportation to school earlier than standard school bus transportation. This means that zero-hour courses tend to exclude students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who more often rely on school-provided transportation services.

## Academic Support Services

### Provide Time Dedicated to Academic Support Services Within the Standard School Day

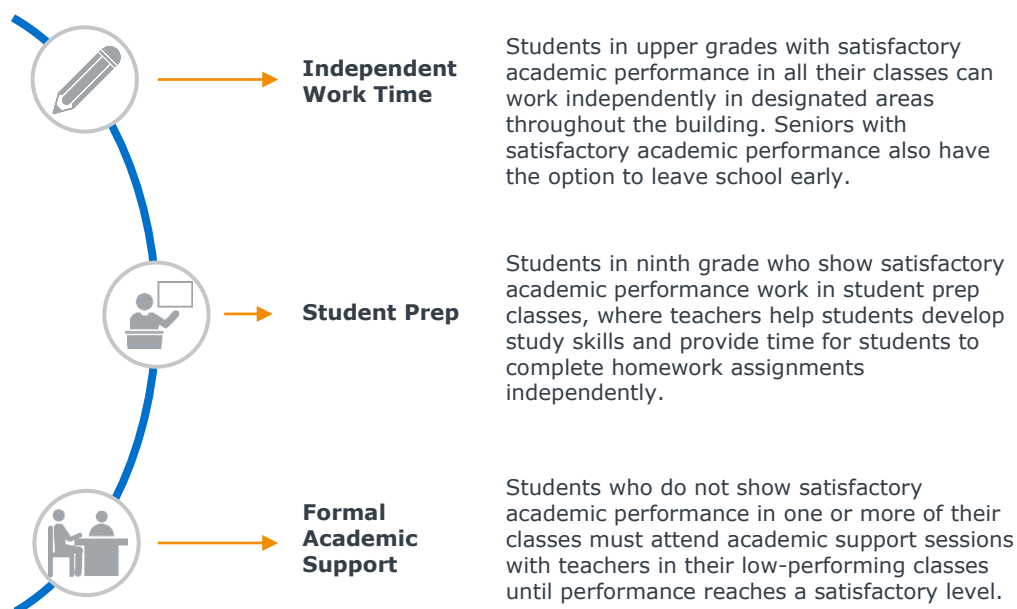
To combat equity-related concerns, many schools have developed options for students to access academic support within the standard daily schedule. Administrators at profiled schools operating all types of schedule models (including

<sup>1</sup> Banicky, L. A. "Block Scheduling: A Review of the Literature." (2012). *Department of Educational Leadership and Assessment*. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4a14/49492a3901da010e3a843c980f0867418105.pdf>.

modified block and traditional six to eight-period models) implement academic support periods, illustrating the adaptability of these opportunities in diverse schedule models.

At **School B**, which operates a modified block schedule, students can access academic support services during a dedicated 58-minute block at the end of one day each week. During this block, teachers can assign students to their classrooms based upon demonstrated need for additional support. Administrators at School B gradually increase student autonomy and choice during the academic support block over the course of their four years of high school.

### Student Activities During Academic Support Block at *School B*



Students at **School D** and **School E** can both access academic support services during the schools' common lunch periods. At School D, students have the freedom to access support services and meet with teachers during the school's 45-minute lunch period, but administrators do not mandate participation. Students at **School E** have time to eat lunch and receive academic support during the school's 60-minute lunch period. Teachers mandate attendance for any students showing insufficient academic progress in their classes and offer the option of attendance to any other students. Students not required to attend these academic support sessions can elect to use this extended open lunch period to conduct student club meetings or coordinate for

#### Adapt School Facilities to Accommodate Common Lunch Periods

If the schedule includes a common lunch session across the entire school to ensure all teachers are available for academic support simultaneously, it can place a strain on the school's available cafeteria facilities. Administrators at **School D** combat this strain by converting available gymnasium space to a satellite cafeteria to accommodate the number of students eating during school-wide common lunch.

other extracurricular opportunities.

Teachers at School E upload grades each Friday, which allows students to see if they will need to attend lunchtime academic support sessions for the upcoming week. For students who consistently miss their required support sessions, administrators host a separate support session. While administrators (e.g., assistant principals) personally manage this group of students, they still provide students with passes to work with other teachers in the building as needed.



### Implement Policies to Address Support Session Assignment for Students in Need of Assistance in Multiple Courses

At **School B**, each academic department has a designated week of priority for enrolling students in their academic support sessions. The scheduling assignments for School B's system reset on a weekly basis to give other departments the opportunity to reach students in need of multiple teachers' support. At **School E**, administrators require students in need of support in multiple classes to attend an academic support session from one of these teachers each day but allow students to decide which session to attend on a day-to-day basis.

Even though **School C** operates a six-period schedule (but with a daily zero-hour option), administrators build in enough time for students to access academic support services multiple times each week. During academic support periods, students meet first with their assigned classroom group. Then, the supervising teacher in each classroom can provide students with passes to meet with other teachers and make up exams or receive extra support. School C operates these academic support periods every Tuesday and Thursday for 45 minutes in between third and fourth period.

Contacts at School B believe that 1:1 computing initiatives are necessary to ensure that students can make full use of available flexible work spaces during academic support periods. In contrast, administrators at School D believe that students can receive the academic support that they need without constant access to a computer.

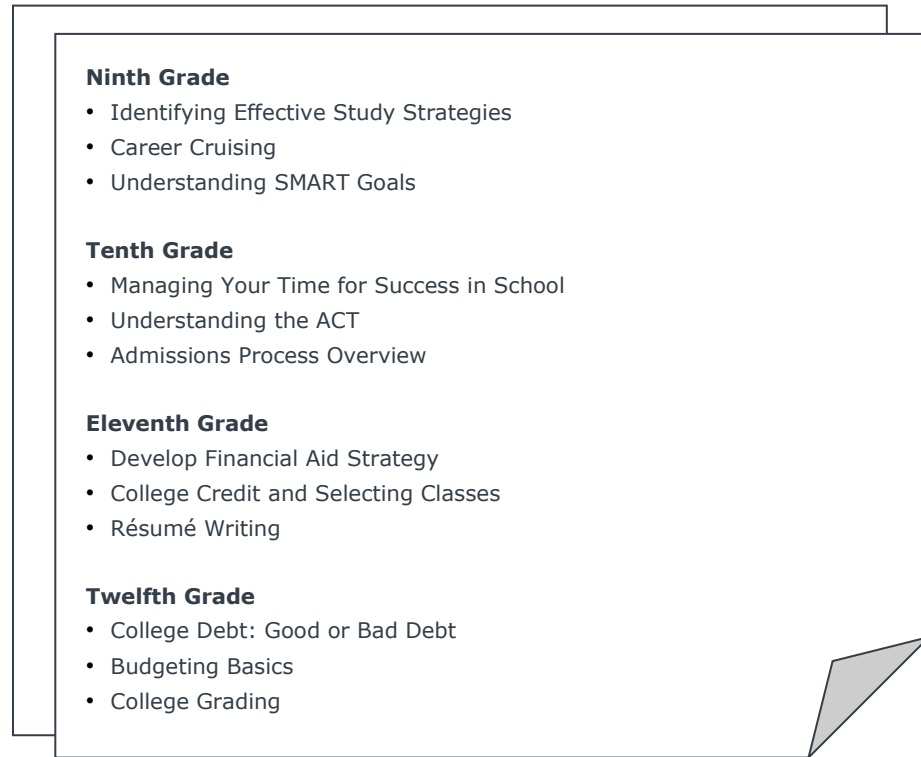
### Administrators Highlight Value of Academic Support Periods

Since implementation of dedicated academic support periods, contacts at **School C** and **School E** report increased academic performance among students. Administrators at School C note the importance of increasing access to academic support services without the added obstacles of securing independent transportation outside of normal school hours. Administrators at School E note that fewer students are failing multiple courses since the implementation of daily academic support periods.

### Include Advisory Class Periods within the School Day to Prepare Students for Post-Graduation Life

Several profiled schools, such as **School A** and **School B**, incorporate advisory periods within the standard school day to provide students with a dedicated space for non-academic support. At School A, students meet with their advisory groups daily, with Wednesday sessions reserved for professional development, career exploration, and college planning lessons. Typically, each teacher within the school will manage an advisory group of roughly 25 students. During initial rollout of the new advisory model, administrators trained teachers on the grade-specific advisory period curricula at quarterly professional development days.

## Sample of Advisory Period Topics at *School A*



Weekly advisory periods at School B cover similar content but focus more on college readiness such as the college application process and options for financial aid. Students meet with the same advisory group for all four years of high school to build strong student-advisor relationships. Administrators at **School C** also prioritize student-advisor relationship development in advisory period guidelines given to teachers.

Students at **School E** also participate in weekly advisory periods, which occur every Wednesday instead of the usual academic support session. A committee of the school's teachers coordinate programming for these advisory periods, using this time for all-class meetings and community service drives.

### 3) Schedule Model Changes

#### Teacher Support

#### Involve Teachers Throughout Schedule Changes to Increase Support

Administrators at all profiled schools express the importance of involving teachers and staff members early in any schedule model change process. Administrators at **School B** note that a shift from shorter periods to longer blocks can be especially challenging for teachers. While longer class sessions offer opportunities for more flexible pedagogical methods, it can be difficult for teachers to adapt teaching methods and fill these longer sessions with engaging content.

To gain teacher perspectives on the impact of schedule changes, administrators at School B and **School C** established teams of teachers to lead the schedule model implementation process. As a part of these efforts at School B, the teacher-led Core Planning Team (CPT) analyzed teacher survey results to make improvements to the new schedule model. For example, teachers communicated a desire for increased instructional time on period-session days, and the CPT found ways to conserve time elsewhere in the daily schedule and add instructional time to each class period.

While administrators at School B made a strong effort to include teachers early in the planning process for the new schedule model, administrators nonetheless wish that they had provided teachers with more formalized support. To help teachers adapt to the requirements of longer block periods, administrators recommend pursuing opportunities such as professional learning community (PLC) group sessions or monthly, all-staff meetings designed to collaboratively troubleshoot common challenges.

#### Core Planning Team (CPT) Functions at *School B*



##### Composition

The CPT included high school teachers representing each of the four main academic disciplines: math, science, English, and social studies.



##### Ongoing Guidance

The CPT managed the school's schedule model shift, providing monthly updates on the status of the change.



##### Survey Feedback

The CPT conducted a teacher survey at the end of the first year of the new schedule model to inform minor changes for the upcoming year.

Administrators at **School E** also conducted a survey at the end of the first year after implementing their schedule model change (i.e., the introduction of lunchtime academic support sessions). However, administrators emphasize that they focused on regular opportunities for feedback as well, such as monthly feedback meetings with administrators. Administrators made teacher attendance at these meetings optional to avoid placing further stress on daily schedules.

Administrators also supported teachers in the schedule change processes by connecting them with teachers at schools in other local school districts with similar schedule models. Administrators at both School B and **School D** invited teachers from other schools with similar schedule models to speak at staff professional

development days. These sessions gave teachers the chance to receive tailored guidance from peers who had recently worked through similar challenges.

### **Provide Benefits to Teachers Participating in Zero-Hour Courses to Ease Implementation**

At profiled schools that operate zero-hour classes, administrators offer teachers special compensation to teach zero-hour classes. These added benefits help incentivize teachers to participate in these classes, which require them to arrive at school earlier than they would under a standard schedule.

This compensation can take both monetary and non-monetary forms. At **School C** and **School D**, administrators allow zero-hour teachers to leave earlier in the day than other teachers because they need to be at school much earlier than their colleagues. Contacts at School C report that this works to fulfill zero-hour teaching needs as many teachers prefer this modified schedule. Administrators at **School A** have negotiated additional monetary compensation into teachers' union contracts in exchange for teaching zero-hour courses.

## **Parent Involvement**

### **Communicate Schedule Model Changes to Parents to Ensure Cooperation with Shifts to New Models**

Administrators at several profiled schools involve parents early in schedule model change processes to ensure that parents fully understand the rationale behind these shifts and support administrators in these processes. Administrators at **School B** had a particularly robust parent communication plan, emphasizing transparency throughout the implementation process for the new schedule model. These contacts underscore the importance of collaborating with parent groups such as the school parent-teacher association to gather meaningful feedback on any schedule model changes.

## Summary of Key Parent Involvement Strategies in Schedule Model Implementation Processes at Profiled Schools



### School A

Administrators send out a weekly newsletter to parents via email. Administrators gather parent email addresses through the district's online enrollment process but still encounter challenges with communicating important messages to parents who did not personally enroll their students in school and thus do not have an email address in the system.



### School B

Administrators used strategies such as parent meetings, teacher-led listening sessions, and coffees with the principal to discuss concerns with schedule model shifts (among any other concerns that parents might have). Administrators chose not to conduct a parent-specific survey because the district already conducts an annual parent satisfaction survey and found other feedback channels to be effective as well.



### School D

Administrators sent a letter to parents about the schedule change and hosted a pre-shift parent meeting led by teachers. In addition, administrators facilitated a meeting with students to provide key information about the new schedule model so that students could answer any further questions that parents might have.

## 4) Research Methodology

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### Project Challenge

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

- What types of schedule models do contact districts currently operate?
- Why did contact districts choose to implement chosen schedule models?
  - What are the biggest challenges associated with chosen schedule models?
  - What are the biggest benefits associated with chosen schedule models?
- What financial impacts do contact districts associate with chosen schedule models?
- How do contact districts manage the space requirements of their chosen schedule model?
- How do contact districts incorporate co-curricular activities into chosen schedule models?
- How do contact districts incorporate intervention strategies into chosen schedule models?
- What types of technology do contact districts use to ease operation of chosen schedule models?
- How do contact districts gain teacher buy-in for schedule model adaptations?
  - What professional development opportunities do contact districts offer to increase new teachers' understanding of chosen schedule models?
- How do contact districts communicate the benefits of chosen schedule models to school community stakeholders?

### Project Sources

Banicky, L. A. "Block Scheduling: A Review of the Literature." (2012). *Department of Educational Leadership and Assessment*. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4a14/49492a3901da010e3a843c980f0867418105.pdf>.

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Research  
Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators managing modified block and zero-hour inclusive schedule models at public high schools across the United States.

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Enrollment
School A	Midwest	800
School B	Midwest	2,750
School C	Midwest	1,320
School D	Mid-Atlantic	850
School E	Mountain West	1,030