EAB

Preparing Teachers for Effective Block Schedule Implementation

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Provide opportunities for teachers to learn about and observe successful block schedule implementation at other schools to garner teacher support and prepare them for the schedule model. Prior to transitioning to a block schedule, administrators at **School B**, **School C**, and **District D** arranged for teachers to visit selected school sites with effective block schedules. In addition, administrators at District D's high schools organized a question-and-answer panel led by the teachers, the principal, and counselors from a charter high school (within the district) that had already successfully moved to this schedule. The panel addressed questions and featured both charter high school teachers who had initially objected to the schedule change and those who had demonstrated support from the beginning. Hearing insights from other teachers who had overcome their opposition to block schedules helped reluctant teachers understand and accept the schedule model.

Provide professional development for all teachers before implementation to ensure that they can successfully teach in the block schedule. Prior to implementation, administrators at **District D** provided two mandatory professional development days to all high school teachers who were transitioning to the block schedule. During the professional development, teachers learned the value of block schedules and effective ways to redesign lesson plans for longer classes. They also practiced developing and executing a sample lesson plan. Similarly, administrators from **School F** provided teachers with five professional development days during the summer that prioritized hands-on lesson planning time. Administrators should make professional development mandatory to ensure that all teachers learn and practice effective block schedule-specific instructional strategies.

Use peer and evaluative classroom observations to ensure ongoing support, accountability, and success of the block schedule model. Administrators at **School B**, **District D**, and **School E** use classroom observations as an opportunity for teachers to learn new strategies and share feedback with each other, for department chairs to identify areas of growth and provide targeted support, and for all stakeholders to ensure ongoing success of the new schedule model. During the first two years of block schedule implementation, administrators at School B encouraged and incentivized teachers to observe their peers to learn effective instructional strategies in a block period. At District D, department chairs regularly conduct classroom observations to ensure ongoing improvement and accountability to strong instructional practices in the block schedule model. Department chairs then provide feedback to district administrators on a weekly basis and collaboratively brainstorm interventions to support teachers.

Monitor and track student outcomes to evaluate the impact of the schedule model on student learning. Administrators at **School E** point to increasing graduation rates and a high number of graduates enrolling in colleges as evidence for the success of their schedule model. Contacts at multiple profiled districts acknowledge that not all outcomes are solely tied to schedule model design and implementation. For example, contacts at **School G** note that other academic innovation initiatives (e.g., 1:1 laptop initiative, co-teaching practices) could have added to the positive impact of block schedules on student outcomes (e.g., higher engagement during class). Yet, contacts remain confident that the schedule model factors into these positive outcomes.

2) Gaining Teacher Support for Block Schedules

Motivations

Demonstrate the Positive Impact of Block Schedules to Engage Teachers

For more information on block schedules, review EAB's brief **A/B Block Schedules for High Schools**.

Administrators should clearly communicate to teachers the value of the block schedule, to help them understand the motivations behind adopting the schedule model. Research demonstrates that block schedules promote in-depth study of content, increase instructional flexibility, and reduce transitions between classes.[1] Students in the block schedule tend to earn higher course grades, score higher on state exams, and demonstrate fewer behavioral problems.[2] In addition, teachers teaching in the block schedule report changing their instructional practices to incorporate more personalized instruction.[3] When teachers understand the impact of the schedule model on student learning, they are more likely to support the change. All profiled districts transitioned to a schedule model that incorporated longer block periods to benefit students.

Overview of Schedule Changes at Profiled Districts

District / School	Block Schedule Elements	Motivation	Year of Implementing Schedule
School A*	A/B block with 80-minute blocks	• Deepen student learning	2011-2012
School B	Modified block with four-day, 90-minute blocks	• Deepen teacher-student relationships • Create a later start time for students • Decrease homework-related stress	2013-2014
School C	Flexible-modular (flex-mod) schedule with 90-minute blocks one to two times a week	• Build student responsibility • Increase student choice	2013-2014
District D	A/B block with 95-minute blocks	• Promote project- and principle-based learning	2016-2017
School E*	Flex-mod schedule with 90-minute blocks up to seven times a week	• Increase students' collaboration, time management, and independent decision-making skills	2013-2014
School F	A/B block with 90-minute blocks	• Deepen student learning • Create a later start time for students	2015-2016
School G	Modified block with eight, 80-minute blocks in a six-day cycle	• Deepen student learning • Increase student collaboration in the classroom	2012-2013

*School A was established in 2011, and School E was established in 2013.

1) Deuel, Lois-Lynn Stoyko. "Block Scheduling in Large, Urban High Schools: Effects on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior, and Staff Perceptions." The High School Journal, 1999. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364426?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.
2) Deuel, Lois-Lynn Stoyko. "Block Scheduling in Large, Urban High Schools: Effects on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior, and Staff Perceptions." The High School Journal, 1999. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364426?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.; Snyder, Dave. "4-Block Scheduling: A Case Study of Data Analysis of One High School After Two Years." Midwestern Educational Research Association, 1997. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED414626.pdf.
3) Deuel, Lois-Lynn Stoyko. "Block Scheduling in Large, Urban High Schools: Effects on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior, and Staff Perceptions." The High School Journal, 1999. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364426?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Align Block Schedule to District Goals of Student Learning

Contacts at all profiled districts emphasize connecting the advantages of the school schedule model to broader goals of student learning, in order to demonstrate the value of the schedule model on student outcomes. When teachers understand how the block schedule benefits student outcomes (e.g., encourages innovative practices to deepen student learning), they are more likely to support the schedule model.

For example, administrators at **School G** framed the block schedule to teachers as part of a larger school vision to move away from direct lectures and towards real-world, hands-on problem-solving and group work, in longer course periods. Similarly, administrators at **District D** integrated the block schedule into a larger vision to transform secondary education, through a focus on project-based learning.

Administrators at **School B** partnered with **Challenge Success** to survey students on socioemotional wellbeing, and then leveraged these data to demonstrate benefits of the block schedule on student learning and outcomes.

Communication of the Block Schedule as a Solution to Student Challenges at *School B*

Student Challenge	Advantage of Block Schedule
 Students did not feel connected to their teachers.	 Longer classes strengthen teacher-student relationships.
 Students felt overwhelmed with the quantity of homework.	 The block schedule reduces student stress related to homework because students balance fewer courses worth of homework each day. Administrators invited Denise Pope, leading researcher at Stanford Graduate School of Education (and co-founder of Challenge Success) to speak about the value of homework and how to effectively assign meaningful homework in the block schedule.
 Students did not utilize the weekly afternoon tutorial period.	 In the block schedule, administrators had the flexibility to change the underutilized tutorial into an optional morning tutorial, to create a later school start time for one day of the week. Administrators at **School F** also emphasize that their block schedule allowed them to establish a later start time for students.
 Students did not receive enough sleep, which negatively impacted their mental health.	

For more information on flex-mod schedules, review EAB's brief **Flexible High School Scheduling Models**.

Both **School C** and **School E** employ a flex-mod schedule. Administrators at School C largely decided to implement the schedule to provide more student and parent choice (e.g., more flexibility with electives). Contacts note that offering a flex-mod schedule also boosted the school's appeal among students and parents within a high-achieving district with open enrollment.

Administrators at School E underlined the high level of student independence and responsibility, which prepares students for post-secondary education, when advocating for the flex-mod schedule. By conveying how the flex-mod schedule allows students to practice important skills that will help them succeed in college, administrators helped teachers see value in the schedule model.

General Engagement Strategies

Provide Opportunities for Teachers to Learn About and Observe Successful Block Schedule Implementation

Prior to transitioning to the block schedule model, administrators at **School C**, **District D**, and **School B** arranged for teachers to visit selected school sites with effective block schedules. By doing so, teachers see firsthand the success of the block schedule model. In addition to teachers, administrators at School C brought board members, community members, and students to tour different school sites.

Administrators at District D high schools also organized a question-and-answer panel led by the teachers, the principal, and counselors from a charter high school (within the district) that had already successfully moved to this schedule model. Teachers and staff submitted questions beforehand. The panel addressed these questions, presented value stories, and shared about the transition phase. The panel featured both charter high school teachers who had initially objected to the schedule change and those who had demonstrated support from the beginning.

Contacts at District D note that some teachers oppose block schedules simply because they do not understand the model or feel apprehensive about any change. Hearing insights from peers at another school who had overcome their opposition to block schedules helped initially reluctant teachers understand and accept the schedule model. Contacts note that after the panel, many initially reluctant teachers expressed willingness to try the schedule model.

Select Teachers to Lead a Block Schedule Committee to Empower and Support Teachers During Change

Administrators at **School B** and **School F** established committees to incorporate teacher input into block schedule design and increase support for the change. At School F, administrators intentionally selected stakeholders that represented diverse roles across the school community, such as teachers, guidance counselors, students, and parents. Involving the community in building the block schedule model mitigates teacher concerns that block schedule implementation is a decision imposed on them by administrators.

Block Schedule Committees at Profiled Districts

Participants	Function
School B  • Open to all teachers and staff and led by teacher leaders (selected by administrators) who were advocates of the block schedule. • The teacher-led format and absence of administrators in the meetings empowers other teachers to freely ask questions and voice concerns.	• Organized open forums for teachers and staff every other week from September to January, one year before implementation • Discussed block schedule advantages and disadvantages • Determined which block schedule model would work best • Invited staff (e.g., custodian, office manager, attendance clerk) to share their perspectives on the block schedule (e.g., how the schedule would impact their roles) • Presented final schedule to all teachers for approval, before delivering recommendation to the school board
School F  • Students, parents, district- and school-level staff (e.g., guidance counselor) and teachers, selected by administrators	• Met once or twice a month for the entire year before schedule implementation • Explored research around the importance of sleep on student learning • Discussed block schedule advantages and disadvantages • Designed a block schedule • Presented recommendation to the school board

When the committee at School B presented the final block schedule to all teachers in January, over 90 percent approved the change and agreed to pilot the new schedule in the fall. By garnering robust teacher buy-in for the block schedule prior to finalizing the change, administrators increase the likelihood of implementation success.

Maintain Open Channels of Communication to Create a Positive Culture of Collaboration and Support

Administrators should create open channels of communication for teachers to voice their concerns and ask questions throughout the planning and implementation stages. Contacts at **School B**, **School C**, **District D**, and **School E** point to the importance of creating a culture of collaboration, prior to and before the new schedule implementation, so that teachers feel adequately supported.

Strategies to Maintain Open Communication and Boost Morale Among Teachers at Profiled Districts

Goal	Execution
 Promote collaboration between teachers and administrators to solve challenges	• Embrace an "all-hands-on-deck" mentality. Emphasize that teachers are not working *for* administrators. Rather, teachers are working *with* administrators to ensure success of the block schedule model. • Designate one administrative point person of support. At **School E**, an academic dean led weekly collaborative meetings with teachers to help them overcome initial challenges. At **School B**, the assistant principal served as the point person.
 Take frequent pulse checks to obtain teacher feedback	• Regularly survey teachers to gauge current challenges and successes. • Use an online platform (e.g., Google Docs) to anonymously survey teacher concerns and frustrations and capture perspectives from teachers who might not be comfortable sharing their opinions in person.
 Maintain transparency	• Acknowledge that change is difficult. Cultivate a growth mindset by reminding teachers that mistakes represent learning opportunities. • Be honest when administrators do not have immediate answers for specific teacher questions.
 Emphasize the larger vision of change transformation	• Remind teachers of the benefits of the block schedule on student success in classrooms. • Encourage teachers to experiment with different instructional practices and classroom strategies.

Resistant Teacher Engagement

Proactively Diagnose and Engage with Teachers Who Demonstrate Resistance and Apprehension Around Change

To effectively mitigate teacher resistance to the block schedule model, administrators should commit to listening to teachers' perspectives, diagnosing the root cause of teacher opposition, and applying a tailored solution to remedy resistance. Contacts at profiled districts emphasize the importance of engaging early on with teachers who demonstrate opposition to the schedule.

Addressing Teacher Resistance to the Block Schedule at Profiled Districts

Root Cause of Resistance	Targeted Solution
Does not understand or see the value in the block schedule model.	Arrange for teachers to visit schools and witness the benefits of the schedule model in real classrooms.
Worries that the block schedule releases teaching time and subsequently reduces staff numbers.	Clarify that administrators will not eliminate any teacher positions.
Has unanswered questions and concerns, and/or feels apprehensive about change.	• Encourage teachers to attend open forums or committee meetings. • Encourage teachers to connect with influential peer advocates of the block schedule model. • Schedule 1:1 time with teachers to address concerns.

In addition, administrators should periodically gauge all teacher voices, to accurately track teacher support for the block schedule. At **School B**, administrators gauged teacher engagement with the schedule model by establishing the expectation that during staff meetings, once an individual shares their opinion, they have to wait until everyone else has had the opportunity to voice their perspective before speaking again. This allows administrators to capture all perspectives and ensure that the biggest dissenters do not disproportionately occupy the feedback space and negatively influence group morale.

Address Limitations of the Block Schedule and Proactively Brainstorm Solutions

Administrators should be open and transparent with teachers about the challenges and limitations inherent within the block schedule model. Administrators should treat challenges as opportunities to collaborate with teachers to develop solutions, such as creating specific block schedule modifications.

For more information on modified block schedules, review EAB's brief **Integrated Academic Support Time**.

Remedying Limitations of the Block Schedule at *School A*

	Challenge	Solution
	If a student misses a day of school, they lose more content from each class than in a traditional, seven-period-day schedule.	Administrators established high priority subjects, math and English Language Arts (ELA) as daily block classes (while Social Studies, science, and elective courses meet every other day). If a student misses a day of school, they will still attend ELA and math the following day.
	Block schedules present challenges for subjects where students might benefit from everyday contact, such as math.	
	In the block schedule, teachers may administer exams to sections on different days. This can inadvertently lead to more cheating incidences (i.e., students sharing answers, which leads to a skewed perception of student understanding).	Administrators and teachers designed more open-ended test questions, to discourage students from cheating.
	The block schedule requires more teacher preparation time.	Administrators provided ample summer professional development to allow teachers to collaboratively prepare lesson plans.

3) Teacher Preparation and Training

Before Implementation

Establish an Instructional Committee to Brainstorm Best Practices for Teaching in the Block Schedule

Implementing any new schedule model reorganizes how student and teachers navigate the academic day. The block schedule does not automatically guarantee higher student achievement. Contacts at all profiled districts emphasize the importance of providing significant training to teachers so they can effectively deliver instruction to students in a new academic environment (i.e., longer class periods).

To equip teachers with effective instructional strategies, administrators at **School G** set up a cross-departmental instructional committee of teachers, parents, and students. For example, they discussed structuring each math block around a different problem-solving strategy and designing investigative labs for science blocks. The committee then shared instructional strategies with the whole staff, and teachers from each department worked together to create content-specific lesson plan templates, in preparation for block schedule implementation.

Instructional Committee at *School G*

Committee Members	Number
Principal	One
Teachers	Eight to ten
Students	Two
Parents	Two

Committee members volunteered to participate in the committee. The committee met after school on a monthly basis, in the year prior to implementing the new schedule.

In addition to establishing a similar instructional committee, administrators and teachers at **School C** consulted with a nearby school (in another district) that was implementing a similar schedule during the same year, to discuss instructional best practices.

Designate Strong Department Chairs to Lead Teachers Through the Schedule Implementation Phase

Administrators at **School B** intentionally selected strong teachers and advocates of the block schedule to serve as department chairs and facilitate teachers' transition into the new block schedule model. During the implementation phase, department chairs requested support from administrators when needed. For example, the science department chair requested that an educator experienced in the block schedule from the county office come and help the science teachers with effective lesson plan design and common assessments. Designating strong department chairs to guide teachers through the implementation phase helps to ensure a smoother transition into the block schedule. By distributing leadership responsibilities to department chairs, administrators ensure that teachers feel empowered to lead the change management process.

Professional Development

Provide Professional Development in the First Year of Implementation on Effective Teaching in the Block Schedule

Administrators at **District D** and **School F** provided professional development in the summer before implementation to prepare teachers for the block schedule. For example, administrators at **School F** provided teachers with five professional development days during the summer that prioritized hands-on planning time. Teacher leaders in the district hosted workshops and discussions on the value of backwards planning and best practices, and supported teachers as they created content-specific lesson templates. Administrators at **School C** compensated all teachers 40 hours of curriculum pay over the summer, so that they could plan and prepare for deployment of the new schedule.

Administrators should make professional development mandatory to ensure that all teachers learn and practice effective block schedule-specific instructional strategies. By providing professional development at different points in the first year of implementation, administrators at District D ensured that teachers built a strong understanding of the block schedule, had instructional tools for the school year, and received consistent support. This multi-pronged professional development approach guarantees both accountability and ongoing success of the block schedule model.

Multi-Pronged Professional Development Approach at *District D*

SUMMER

- **Day 1:** Instructional coaches led teachers through following questions: Why does the block schedule work? How does the block schedule facilitate more hands-on, in-depth learning?
- **Day 2:** In small groups, teachers practiced developing and executing a lesson plan within the block schedule.
- After the two days, teachers scheduled additional time to work with department colleagues on content-specific lesson plans.

START OF SCHOOL YEAR

- As a refresher to summer professional development, the principal and teachers discussed daily learning targets, mapped out a sample lesson plan, and brainstormed how to creatively restructure the classroom (e.g., alternatives to arranging desks in straight rows).
- Principals shared non-content-specific instructional strategies and tools (e.g., Word of the Week, activities to "open" and "close" a class, **Kahoot!**).
- Teachers created and discussed content-specific lesson plans. For example, science teachers discussed framing lessons around claim-evidence reasoning, and Social Studies teachers brainstormed orienting lessons around document-based questions.

WEEKLY

- District administrators held an optional monthly, after-school meeting (open to both new and experienced teachers) to review instructional practices, discuss challenges, and brainstorm solutions.
- Department chairs, principals, and/or instructional coaches often attended to provide additional support (e.g., content delivery, classroom structure/climate).

Administrators at **District D** provided two mandatory summer professional development days to all 300 teachers who were transitioning to the block schedule. Currently, all teachers new to a district high school must participate in these summer professional development days, as well as two (recently developed) training days on effective teamwork and project-based learning.

Design Professional Development After Classroom Expectations to Model Robust Instructional Practices for Teachers

Contacts at **School E** emphasize that all professional learning should model the expectations of a teacher's role in the classroom—regardless if the professional learning is related to the block schedule. The principal, assistant principal, and instructional coaches who lead professional development sessions should act as facilitators, rather than lecturers, and prioritize teacher engagement and practice. Modeling the teaching style district administrators expect teachers to employ

in block schedules continues to reinforce strong instructional practices after initial professional development and schedule implementation.

Teacher Experts at *School A* Lead Professional Development for Their Peers

At **School A**, administrators select teacher leaders to develop lessons, curriculum, and professional development for other teachers. Contacts emphasize that teachers, instead of administrators, should develop and lead professional development because teachers hold credibility among their peers due to shared experiences. Teacher leaders provide coaching on curriculum and instruction to help their colleagues within the department teach effectively in the block schedule.

Integrate Teacher Planning Time into the Schedule to Allow Collaboration on Effective Strategies for the Block Schedule

Administrators at **School A** and **School C** embed collaborative planning time into teachers' weekly schedules. At School A, where students take ELA and math classes every day, ELA and math teachers meet twice a week. For other subjects that meet every other day, teachers meet once a week. During this meeting time, teachers gather to discuss the curriculum, analyze student work (e.g., identify gaps in student learning, celebrate growth), and collaboratively address challenges within their content area.

Similarly, administrators at **School C** integrate a 90-minute planning period in the weekly schedule for teachers from the same grade and content area (e.g., ninth grade, social studies teachers) to collaborate. In the flex-mod schedule at School C, three teachers from the same grade and content area combine their 30-minute classes into a shared 90-minute period, once or twice a week. The teachers share delivery of instruction during these 90-minute periods. The weekly planning time allows teachers to develop their co-teaching approach for the 90-minute period.

Consider Partnering with External Organizations for Professional Development to Strengthen Teachers' Instructional Practices

Administrators at **School A** and **School E** partner with external organizations to provide professional development to teachers on effective instructional practices in their schedule models. School A leverages professional development from Uncommon Schools, a charter school and public school district network. Specifically, administrators cite professional development around active monitoring, in order to promote active student learning in a longer block period. Administrators send teacher representatives to attend off-site professional development sessions. Teacher representatives then come back to the school and deliver professional development to the rest of the teachers.

External Partnerships for Professional Development at *School E*

	Characteristics	Function
 **Critical Friends Group (CFG)**	• CFG is a type of professional learning community (PLC) certified by the National School Reform Faculty. • A CFG-certified coach leads a group of teachers (i.e., five to 12) within a school. • The group meets for a minimum of two hours per month.	• Teachers examine and hone their classroom practices through honest, constructive feedback from peers and CFG coach, and collaborative discussion. • For example, teachers might focus on designing learning goals that are clear enough to be observed in a classroom by a peer or coach. • Teachers in a CFG can also attend regional and national meetings to broaden their network of support.
 **Expeditionary Learning (EL) Education**	• EL Education is a professional network of public schools and charter schools. • Focuses on the three dimensions of student achievement: mastery of knowledge and skills, high quality work, and character. • A member district can access digital resources, professional learning off-campus, and annual, national conferences.	• Administrators contract with an EL Education Professional Development coach who helps teachers with instructional design and student engagement in the classroom, through the workshop model (i.e., students spend most of the block period working on a hands-on project). Last year, administrators contracted the professional development coach for 25 days on-site.

Profiled Districts Leverage Current External Partnerships to Support Block Schedule Implementation

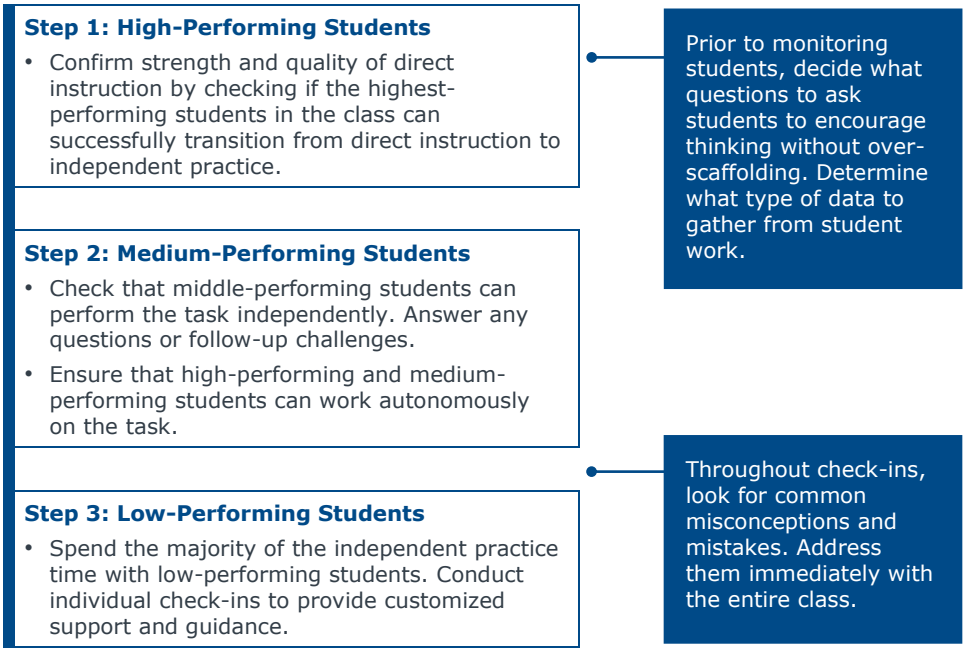
Administrators from **School B** invited educators from the county office with expertise in the block schedule to provide customized support in instructional practices to specific departments. Administrators at **District D** leveraged their existing partnership with **Ford Next Generation Learning** to receive support during the block schedule implementation process.

Prioritize Student Application of Skills and Active Monitoring to Promote High Student Engagement in the Classroom

Contacts at multiple profiled districts emphasize that, in an effective block period, teachers do not lecture for the entire block, nor do they simply break up a 90-minute block into two 45-minute lessons or allow students to complete homework during class. Instead, the most effective teachers prioritize active learning to build student understanding, engagement, and agency.

Administrators and teachers at **School A** orient block periods around in-depth, independent student practice. In this framework, teachers deliver robust, direct instruction for a maximum of 20 minutes and actively monitor student understanding and progress during assigned practices for the rest of the class. When teachers release students to complete independent work, they use the following active monitoring strategy.

Active Monitoring Strategy at *School A*



Active monitoring centers on analyzing student work, providing feedback in real-time, and adjusting instruction based on observations. In addition, assigning exit tickets allows teachers to gauge student understanding of new topics, informing the direction of the next block period. Contacts note that, by using active monitoring, teachers execute highly effective and productive block classes.

Overview of 80-Minute English Language Arts Block at *School A*[4]

"Do Now": Student Work Time (5-7 minutes)

- Students answer questions on the previous day's independent reading.

Vocabulary Study (10 minutes)

- Students work in pairs to apply knowledge of vocabulary.
- The whole class debriefs one or two of the most difficult vocabulary words.

Exit Ticket Preview (1-2 minutes)

- Teacher reviews the exit ticket (i.e., guiding question for the day) and task to frame the lesson.
- For example, an exit ticket might be, "on pages 43-45 of *Lord of the Flies*, does William Golding demonstrate that people are born evil or that they become evil through their experiences?"

Close Reading, Part 1 (8-10 minutes)

- Students perform a deep dive into a section of the previous day's independent reading that will help them answer the exit ticket.

Close Reading, Part 2 (8-10 minutes)

- Students perform the above task for another section of the previous day's independent reading.

Whole Class Discussion (8 minutes)

- Class collectively verbally processes the exit ticket question, which is designed to surface robust discussion and encourage students to practice identifying strong evidence.

Exit Ticket (12 minutes)

- Students independently answer exit ticket question, typically in paragraph form.

Active Monitoring During Independent Reading (15-20 minutes)

- Students independently conduct first read of the following class's focus pages and completes comprehension questions.
- Teacher circulates the room. The teacher checks exit tickets (and follows up on those requiring immediate revision) or monitors for accurate reading comprehension.

4) School A, provided July 3, 2019.

Indirect instruction in math is supported by the research of Jo Boaler (Professor of Mathematics Education at Stanford Graduate School of Education), **Cognitively Guided Instruction**, and **Thinking Mathematically**.

Math teachers at **School A** emphasize indirect instruction, which also aligns with the Common Core standards. Through this pedagogical approach, teachers encourage students to take risks and promote discovery of mathematics through a combination of independent, partner, and class activities. For example, teachers encourage students to work with partners or small groups to apply their background knowledge and best thinking to an unfamiliar task.

Overview of 80-Minute Math Block at *School A*[5]

"Do Now": Student Work Time (8 minutes)

- The "do now" is characterized by two purposes—to activate learning for the lesson and to frontload, foreshadow, or remediate a concept or skill.
- Teacher actively monitors the students, providing feedback and extensions.

"Do Now": Class Conversation (12 minutes)

- The conversation extends the math concept and adds depth.

Task: Student Work Time (6-10 minutes)

- Teacher poses a task that promotes independent engagement in the Common Core standards for mathematical practice.
- Teacher monitors student work—not for feedback purposes but rather to prepare to facilitate a student-driven class conversation.

Task: Debrief (10-15 minutes)

- Teacher places one or more student's work under the document camera. The work displays a new student strategy, a new mathematical rule, or a helpful representation that will benefit the rest of the class.
- Teacher then poses questions to allow the rest of the community to access, understand, and replicate the new mathematics.
- Teacher gives students action steps, such as "Use your classmate's strategy to solve this problem" or "summarize how your classmate used a table as a tool."

Partner Practice to Apply New Learning (10-15 minutes)

- Teacher assigns new material that is very similar to the previous task and increases in complexity.
- Teacher does not give students an "exit ticket" to assess them on this newest learning. Instead, students leverage the support of a partner.
- Teacher circulates to provide feedback and extensions.

Independent Practice (20-25 minutes)

- Students work on a cumulative practice (e.g., five items from the previous week's learning and five items on the new topic) independently while teachers actively monitor and provide feedback.
- Before the teacher deems an item appropriate for independent practice, students must have already practiced with partners on previous occasions and revisited the item on "do nows".

5) School A, provided July 5, 2019.

Consider the Workshop Model to Promote Student-Centered Instruction

Effective teachers design lessons that encourage students to engage in multiple skills (e.g., learning new content, building understanding, applying knowledge in the same lesson).[6] By doing so, teachers ultimately allow students to deepen their understanding and foster student motivation and agency. In response, teachers at **School E** design instruction around the workshop model, in which students spend most of the block period working on a hands-on project independently, in pairs, or in groups.[7]

The workshop model includes both direct instruction and hands-on learning, to maximize time for students to apply their new knowledge. At School E, teachers easily adapt the workshop model (i.e., vary time allotted for independent student work time) to fit 30-, 60-, and 90-minute classes within their flex-mod schedule. They use clear and measurable daily and long-term learning targets to guide instruction for students. Contacts emphasize that the workshop model creates a shift in teacher attitude and mindset. The teacher transitions from authority figure of knowledge to active facilitator of student voice and learning.

Workshop Model for a Block Period at *School E*[8]

"Do Now": Warm-Up (5 minutes)

- Students complete brief assignment (e.g., reading, writing, editing, solving a problem) independently.

Direct Instruction (15-20 minutes)

- The teacher delivers instruction to the whole class.
- The teacher outlines expectations for the independent work that students will complete next.

Independent Student Work Time (varies)

- Students work on a task independently, in pairs, or in small groups.
- The teacher circulates for a few minutes to make sure everyone is on task, and then conducts 1:1 check-ins and re-delivers direct instruction to a smaller group if needed.

Debrief (5 minutes)

- With the whole class, the teacher reviews the learning target of the day, showcases and discusses an example of student work, and/or assigns an exit ticket.

6) Berger, Ron. "We Learn by Doing: What Educators Get Wrong About Bloom's Taxonomy." Education Week, 2018. https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/09/26/we-learn-by-doing-what-educators-get.html.
7) "The Workshop Model." New York Department of Education. Accessed July 10, 2019. https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Workshop-model-planning2.pdf.
8) Ibid.

4) Ensuring and Measuring Ongoing Success

Continued Value

Use Peer and Evaluative Classroom Observations to Ensure Ongoing Support, Success, and Accountability

Through classroom observations, administrators at multiple profiled districts ensure ongoing success of the new schedule model.

The Benefits of Classroom Observations on Block Schedule Success

- ☑ Teachers learn new instructional practices from each other.
- ☑ Observing teachers, department chairs, and administrators provide constructive feedback on specific criteria (e.g., visibility and usage of learning targets, prioritization of active learning in the classroom). They follow up with customized support to help teachers maximize the longer instructional time in a block period.
- ☑ Teachers and administrators celebrate block schedule successes in the classroom.

During the first two years of block schedule implementation, administrators at **School B** encouraged and incentivized teachers to shadow their peers to learn effective instructional strategies in a block period. Administrators provided substitute teachers and/or additional compensation to ensure teachers had ample opportunities to observe their peers without sacrificing preparatory time. Contacts note that peer observations help teachers better understand how to create a clear agenda and learning objectives, and effectively manage instructional time.

At **District D**, department chairs regularly conduct classroom observations to ensure ongoing improvement and accountability to strong instructional practices in the block schedule model. To ensure consistent support for teachers in the block schedule, particularly for newer teachers, administrators embed an instructional support hour into each department chair's weekly schedule.

Classroom Observations Approach at *District D*

1. Department chairs observe individual teachers in their classrooms, using an observation rubric focused on classroom structure, teaching quality, and clear learning targets.
2. Department chairs share feedback with district administrators in weekly meetings.
3. Department chairs and district administrators collectively brainstorm interventions to support teachers. For example, district administrators might ask an instructional coach to provide additional support to a teacher who demonstrates strength in content but challenges with discipline in a block period. For a teacher who demonstrates strong relationships with students but struggles with content delivery, the department chair might work with them 1:1 to discuss instructional strategies that maximize the longer class time.
4. Department chairs also observe teachers in other content areas to learn and gather strategies that could be applied to their own content area.

Classroom observations also can surface areas of growth to ensure ongoing improvement of the schedule model. For example, at **School E**, teachers would often pose rhetorical questions to gauge student understanding of content. However, when a teacher asks, "Does anyone have a question?" or "Does that make sense?", they inadvertently allow lack of a response to be confirmation of student understanding. One solution is to pose a question, ask students to discuss the answer in pairs, and then select a few pairs to share their response with the whole class. Contacts note that this strategy helps to boost student engagement and equity in the classroom.

Train and Provide Lesson Plans to Substitute Teachers to Ensure Consistent, High Instructional Quality

Administrators and department chairs at **District D** collaborate to prepare substitute teachers to teach block classes. Administrators provide training on effective teaching during block schedules to substitutes. Department chairs ensure that when teachers plan to be absent, they provide substitute teachers with a clearly developed and instructionally sound lesson plan.

Create Professional Learning Opportunities for Teachers to Strengthen Instructional Practices and Actively Workshop Challenges

Teachers at **School C** share specific best practices and value stories during all-faculty meetings, and collaboratively tackle challenges in department meetings. Administrators highlight positive examples of teaching in the block schedule and workshop shared challenges to encourage faculty resilience and to build engagement with the new schedule model.

In addition, teachers at School C participate in PLCs to ensure ongoing accountability around high-quality instruction, and ultimately ensure the success of teaching practices in the block schedule.

Sample Discussion Topics in PLCs at *School C*

- ☑ Common assessments (e.g., format, analysis)
- ☑ Analysis of student data
- ☑ Alignment of curriculum with school-specific standards
- ☑ Collaborative teaming to build an inclusive school
- ☑ Student equity

For more information on PLCs, review EAB's brief **Professional Learning Communities**.

Similarly, teachers at **School E** engage in PLCs to connect instruction in the block schedule to the larger school-wide vision of student learning. For one hour every other week, teachers meet in interdisciplinary teams to engage in one facilitated topic. Last year's topic focused on ensuring equity and supporting students with trauma. Across the year, teachers learned about trauma-informed education (e.g., how different experiences of trauma might impact a student's ability to learn, how to cultivate awareness of and manage implicit bias), practiced these strategies in the block schedule, and observed each other in the classroom and provided constructive feedback.

Outcomes

Survey School Stakeholders to Gauge Impact of New Schedule

Contacts at **School B**, **School C**, **School E**, and **School G** emphasize the importance of surveying teachers after schedule implementation, particularly in the first year. Administrators at School C conducted informal, monthly staff surveys to understand how teachers were doing. After the first three years of the new schedule, the school board formally polled students, teachers, and parents to analyze the effects of the schedule and pinpoint areas of improvement.

Three-Year, Post-Implementation Sample Survey Questions at *School C*[9]

Stakeholders	Questions
 **All**	• What do you like about the schedule? • What do you find most challenging about the schedule? • Any additional comments that would be beneficial as we continue with this schedule?
 **Students**	• What grade are you currently in? • What are your plans after graduation? • On a scale of one to four, how knowledgeable do you feel about the schedule? • On a scale of one to four, how do you feel about the schedule?
 **Teachers**	• How many years have you been teaching? • How has the schedule affected your students' learning? • How do you use your collaboration time? • What professional development opportunities do you feel you need to be more successful in the schedule?
 **Parents**	• What grade are your students in at the high school? • How many students do you currently have at the high school? • Do you have a student who has graduated in the last five years? • How knowledgeable do you feel about the schedule? • How do you think your son/daughter/children feel(s) about the schedule in general?

Monitor the Impact of the Block Schedule on Student Learning by Regularly Tracking Student Progress

Contacts at multiple profiled districts recommend consistently monitoring student progress to determine the impact of the block schedule on student learning. For example, teachers at **School A** administer interim assessments every eight weeks (in addition to testing students at the end of each three-to-four-week-long unit). Administrators keep interim assessments results over multiple years, so that they can compare student learning from one year to the next.

Contacts at **School A** note that improved student performance and growth also helps administrators continue to build buy-in for the schedule model among teachers and other stakeholders.

At **School E**, teachers and administrators track and present three dimensions of student achievement (i.e., mastery of knowledge and skill, high quality work, character) on a physical "learning wall" in the professional development room. Contacts note that showcasing student outcomes in this manner ensures that teachers and administrators can access and view the data at any time, celebrate strengths and successes, and discuss areas of improvement. Teachers and administrators gather data at multiple points during the year.

9) School C, provided June 20, 2019.

Sample Student Metrics Tracked at *School E*

Goal	Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics
Mastery of Knowledge and Skill All students will develop a rich conceptual understanding of skills and content, be able to communicate about their learning, and apply skills and knowledge to solve real-world problems.	• AP classes: number of students enrolled, distribution of gender and race, test results • Dual enrollment courses: number of students enrolled, average course pass rate • Graduation rates • Amount of scholarship money awarded • First semester grade report results • End-of-course assessment results
High Quality Work Students will create multiple pieces of work that display craftsmanship, complexity, and authenticity.	• Student work (e.g., projects)
Character Students will graduate with character and develop a deep connection to their community.	• Community service initiatives • Discipline rates

Analyze Overall Student Outcomes Data and Anecdotal Evidence to Gauge Effectiveness of Schedule Model

Contacts at **School E** and **School G** point to positive academic and behavioral outcomes as evidence of success of their course schedule. For example, contacts at School E note that their flex-mod schedule creates additional time for teachers and students to meet outside of class and gives students the opportunity to practice organization and time management skills. School E graduates who attend college report feeling confident in collaborating with professors during office hours and managing their time.

Student Outcome Improvements Since Adoption of Course Schedules

	Academic and Behavioral Outcomes
School E	• Increased graduation rates (i.e., from 81 percent in 2014 to over 94 percent in 2019) • 90 percent of graduates enroll in two- or four-year colleges • Increased college scholarships • Increased teacher retention rates
School G	• Increased state test scores • Decreased number of in-class disruptions • Decreased number of disruptive hallway incidents (e.g., student fights) • Increased student attendance

Contacts at School E and School G acknowledge that not all outcomes are solely tied to schedule model design and implementation. For example, contacts at School G acknowledge that other academic innovation initiatives (e.g., 1:1 laptop initiative, co-teaching practices) could have added to the positive impact of block schedules on student outcomes (e.g., higher engagement during class). Yet, contacts at both districts believe that the schedule model definitively factors into these outcomes.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenges

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

- How do contact districts employ block schedules?
- When did contact districts initially implement block schedules?
- How did contact districts gather teacher support for the shift from a traditional to block schedule model?
- What professional development did contact districts provide to prepare teachers for longer courses with block schedule implementation?
- What strategies do teachers at contact districts employ to maximize additional instructional time in block schedules?
- What strategies do teachers at contact districts employ to ensure high student engagement, given additional class time in block schedules?
- How do contact districts support teachers to ensure ongoing success for the block schedule model?
- Do contact districts partner (or consider partnering) with a third-party organization to provide professional development to teachers in preparation for or during block schedule implementation?
- How do contact districts respond to initial and ongoing challenges of block schedule implementation?
- How do contact districts evaluate the success of the block schedule model, specifically on the impact on student outcomes?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

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Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed school and district-level administrators.

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

District / School	Location	Approximate Enrollment
School A	Mountain West	900
School B	Pacific West	800
School C	Midwest	1,100
District D	Midwest	19,100
School E	South	2,000
School F	Pacific West	1,400
School G	Mid-Atlantic	1,300