



**LEVERAGING TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES:**  
Rethinking critical levers to optimize student  
performance and teacher effectiveness

**Battelle** *for Kids*

How time, talent, and resources are utilized in schools dramatically affects the ability of educators to accomplish the goal of successfully preparing students for college and career success. Schools evolve over time to reflect a combination of financial constraints, policy requirements, and community needs. This often happens incrementally over time without schools having the opportunity to stop and rethink what makes the most sense for students, teachers and the community in achieving desired outcomes.



The school schedule is a powerful tool for extending and deepening the instructional program and improving student learning. While many schools would like to redesign their use of time, there are concerns that often get in the way. Does a change in the master schedule require additional budget? If we are creating time for teachers to collaborate during the school day, how do we adequately supervise students? How do we work around busing schedules, part-time specials/arts teachers, or sacred cows that have previously required time?

All of these are significant issues, but they are also manageable when schools adopt a new paradigm around how to use time, talent, and resources. The primary consideration when revamping your school schedule is your set of priorities. Your school priorities should drive the redesign of your schedule. Given the needs of your staff, your resources, your current student performance, and the goals you want to achieve, what are the most critical elements to build into your school schedule? Most high-performing schools, regardless of their resource level, create a school schedule with specific goals in mind and develop the policies, beliefs, practices, and commitments that allow them to be successful and significantly improve student learning outcomes.

## PRIORITIES AND GOALS

The most effective uses of time, talent, and resources ensure that a district or school is focused on achieving their most critical success factors. For example schools may want to close achievement, opportunity, and workforce-readiness gaps through:

1. Increasing instructional time in core classes (reading and/or math)
2. Offering students course work that prepares them for success in high-growth industries
3. Making time to address social/emotional growth through an advocacy or advisory program, or even health and wellness activities.
4. Providing more opportunities for extra-curricular activities or internship or apprenticeship programs
5. Structuring interventions critical for students who need additional support
6. Encouraging more students to enroll in rigorous courses/programs (e.g. advanced placement, dual enrollment, advanced courses, international baccalaureate) and providing the structures and support necessary for students to be successful
7. Providing daily collaboration and planning time for teachers
8. Providing job-embedded professional learning time for staff
9. Implementing an inclusion model for students with disabilities
10. Accommodating blended and online learning opportunities

All of these are worthy goals, but none of them can be achieved without utilizing time, talent, and resources in new ways that will ultimately be reflected in scheduling, hiring practices, space utilization, and school and district policies.

*“One of the greatest ‘sacred cows’ that we need to address in high school is to shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.”*

–Principal from the Battelle for Kids Learning Lab on Innovative Scheduling

For example, if you would like to provide more rigorous course offerings in a high school, you will need to decide what courses will be offered? How will you encourage students to enroll in these courses? What additional supports will you put in place so students do not feel penalized for enrolling in more rigorous coursework?



Similarly, if a priority of your new schedule is to increase the amount of collaboration and learning time for teachers, you will want to consider who will collaborate with whom (same grade, same subject, or both)? How often will teachers collaborate? What is the focus or desired outcome of this collaboration? What professional learning is needed to develop the skills for effective collaboration? How can accountability be built into the collaboration time?

*“Buses, beans, and balls can no longer drive the redesign of our school day for better teaching and learning.”*

A well-conceived reconfiguration of time in the school day can support multiple simultaneous priorities. However, tough decisions often have to be made about trade-offs based on the most pressing needs of students, teachers, and the community.

–Principal from the Battelle for Kids Learning Lab on Innovative Scheduling

1. What are your most important priorities/values?
2. What does data indicate are your most pressing challenges?
3. Which priorities have positive repercussions on other things you care about?
4. What trade-offs will you consider to achieve your priorities?
5. What constituencies need to be part of the decision making, planning and implementation process?

Successful schools stay true to their goals and priorities when answering these questions. While effective schools may have different goals for their schedules, all have schedules that reflect their priorities and goals. Also, not all well-intended changes in the schedule produce the desired benefits.

### CONSIDER:

More Time for Collaboration and Professional Learning	Power of Relationships	Early Childhood Education Including Full-Day Kindergarten
<p>Countries that continue to outperform the United States on international assessments have created schedules that allocate more time to teacher development and collaboration.</p> <p><i>Question:</i> How do we provide more time for teachers to collaborate and learn without destroying our budget? How do we ensure collaboration time focuses conversations on student learning and teacher practice?</p>	<p>Providing more time for teachers to build relationships with students has a profound impact on learning and on classroom culture.</p> <p><i>Question:</i> While longer class periods enable teachers to get to know their students better, do teachers need additional training to leverage these relationships for more powerful learning? How do we ensure that academic learning time is increased and not just allocated time?</p>	<p>There is powerful evidence of the benefits of full-day kindergarten.</p> <p><i>Question:</i> Is the move to full-day kindergarten adding allotted time to the school day or academic learning time? Are kindergarten teachers’ talents being leveraged in the school day?</p>

## EXAMINING ASSUMPTIONS

One of the biggest barriers to restructuring time is the set of assumptions that you and your staff currently hold. These assumptions could be things like:

1. All teachers teach the same number of classes and the same number of students
2. Every subject is allocated the same amount of learning time
3. The school day starts and ends at the same time for everyone
4. Experienced teachers are given priority in scheduling
5. Collaborative time requires additional resources
6. Equal treatment is the same thing as equitable treatment
7. Certain programs must be protected even if they serve few students

As an important aspect of the school redesign process, you will have to identify and confront many of these assumptions. New priorities cannot be pursued until the old, often unspoken, priorities are surfaced, examined, and in some cases discarded.

## LEVERAGING TIME

Common sense suggests that more time equates to more learning. But increasing time by itself will likely not improve student learning. If you are considering utilizing time differently, the primary questions should always be:

If we alter our use of time, what results do we seek and what are we willing to be held accountable for? And, are the changes we are making in our schedule tightly coupled to our priorities?

Time during the school day can be put in one of three buckets:

1. **Allocated Time**—The amount of time assigned to a period or day
2. **Engaged Time**—The portion of instructional time that students spend directly involved in learning activities
3. **Academic Learning Time**—The “sweet spot.” Academic learning time (ALT) is the amount of time students spend attending to relevant academic tasks and performing those tasks with a high rate of success.

Of these three buckets, academic learning time is the only one that is strongly related to improving student performance. So as you think about leveraging time, focus your attention on increasing the percentage of academic learning time that each student experiences every day. In doing so, consider the many ways in which students can learn and how the instructional pedagogy of the school can change with the new use of time in a way that benefits students.

If one of your priorities is to add collaboration time for teachers, these same time distinctions also hold true. Allocated time and engaged time are not the same as academic learning time. How will you ensure that learning and collaboration time for your teachers is being utilized as effectively as possible? What are the relevant learning tasks for teachers, and how can you ensure that they are performing those tasks with a high rate of success? Experience and research have demonstrated that effective teacher collaboration requires a prioritized focus for each collaboration period, leadership, and a way to report outcomes to foster accountability.

*“Once our teachers became familiar and committed to our building’s priorities, they were able to take a more active role in scheduling each year.”*

—Principal from the Battelle for Kids Learning Lab on Innovative Scheduling



When you begin the process of developing a new schedule with the sole intention of creating more time, be aware that time alone may not produce the results you seek. Rather, the time has to be utilized more effectively to drive and improve learning, school culture, teacher practice, etc. When thinking about time, always ask a two part question: how can we gain **more** time, and how will it be used **better**?



## Benefits of Extending Periods and Blocking

One of the first questions that arises when rethinking time is, “*Are all subjects created equal?*” Many elementary and middle schools have increased the time they allocate to literacy and numeracy. In Massachusetts, often referred to as the state with the most rigorous standards, Boston’s Roxbury Preparatory Charter School **doubled** the instructional time for math and language arts (Farbman and Kaplan, 2005). As a result, 100 percent of the eighth graders who had three years of double math time passed the MCAs (the state’s standardized test) while only 70 percent of the students did so previously.

With longer class periods there are fewer class-to-class transitions, more time for differentiation, and more time to dive deeper into the content. There is also more time to utilize strategies such as blended learning and flexible grouping based on the current successes and challenges that students are experiencing.



## LEVERAGING TALENT

For most districts, personnel costs are more than 85 percent of the budget. How can a district use its talent more efficiently and effectively to improve student outcomes and, at the same time, stay within the budget? Just as there are a variety of schedules that reflect a building's priorities and goals, there are also many ways that districts can creatively use their staff to improve student academic performance. Some examples include:

- **Using Special Education Teachers/Intervention Specialists Differently:** With an emphasis on inclusion and gap closing, it no longer makes sense to assign special education and intervention teachers to only work in pull-out environments. In many schools, these teachers are used as “strategists” to help teachers improve their assessment and differentiation skills. When these teachers work together with other teachers in co-teaching environments, they can also begin to assume some of the responsibilities that used to be reserved for special education supervisors.
- **Highly Effective Teachers:** Many districts are beginning to think about how they leverage their best teachers. Is there more value that these teachers can provide to their school? Some districts, for example, are assigning their most effective teachers to high needs schools. This allows the best teachers to work with students who need them most. Some schools are matching up teachers' strengths with the kinds of students they serve. Teachers who are especially effective with low- or high-achieving students may be assigned a higher percentage of those students on their rosters.

Many elementary schools are moving away from self-contained classrooms that require teachers to spread their focus over multiple subject areas. By allowing their best math teachers to teach more math, students and teachers both benefit. This shift may also allow teachers to reduce prep loads to provide more time to meet with students, provide intervention, or provide other opportunities for students.

A number of schools are also beginning to use highly effective teachers as models for professional learning. As facilitators of professional learning teams, these teachers have the opportunity to transform the professional learning climate of an entire school.

- **Teachers as Leaders.** Turbulent times with multiple new mandates require more leadership than building principals alone can provide. By empowering teachers to lead alongside the principal, goals can be achieved more efficiently and more effectively. By empowering teachers as teacher leaders, a building may be able to reduce administrative costs and even improve staff morale. More schools are creating grade level, building, and district leadership teams and delegating responsibilities that used to be owned only by principals. Through reallocating leadership responsibility, principals may actually create the time to become real instructional and learning leaders.
- **Electives/Specials/Arts.** Electives and specials teachers may be among the most underutilized educators. Schools that have strong elective teachers and ample student choice for scheduling have strong cultures. Leveraging the talents of these educators in additional roles, doing grade-level scheduling to create common planning time, integrating other subjects into class content (art technology), and having additional elective classes as incentives are all examples of how these teachers and courses are being used differently.



### *Skill and Will*

*New York City, most often referred to as one of the strongest unions in the country, revamped of one their lowest performing high schools' schedules and how talent was used working alongside the union. It is now one of the higher performing high schools. Clearly, it is as much a case of "will" as "skill" when working to redesign the school day.*

-Jon Reinhard,  
Generation Schools

## LEVERAGING RESOURCES

“Doing more with less” is the common mantra today in most school districts. Even affluent districts are being forced to cut budgets and to be more creative in their use of resources. Some examples of how we have seen resources used differently include:

- **Rethinking What it Means to Take a Course:** Some schools are now using blended or online learning to save time and money. Some courses have been moved to summer or other grade levels to free up choices for students. By blocking courses it is often possible to create more time for teacher collaboration and also make more choices available for students. With online learning resources, it’s also easier to run advanced placement labs or subject labs and have students at multiple levels working on the same subject or different subjects simultaneously facilitated by a teacher or staff member. Learning labs also give students who need it extra time for content to be reinforced, remediated, or accelerated.
- **Utilizing Community Partnerships:** There may be resources that benefit student learning available and assessable in the community. Schools may contract with community partners (non-profits, community colleges, and trade unions) to expand learning time and skill development opportunities for students through coordinated programs, staff sharing, or joint grant writing, increasing opportunities for students and offering schools more schedule flexibility.
- **Swarming:** Swarming is a technique that some schools have used successfully that allocates the majority of staff at set times and with a specified focus on areas that need extra attention; an “all hands on deck” approach. For example, the staff can swarm around foundation courses (Humanities & STEM) in the morning with small class sizes and then teach one elective course in the afternoon with slightly large classes to allow grade-level teams to have common planning time.
- **Adjusting Roles and Responsibilities:** Education has become too rigid around many practices that just don’t make sense. For example, a national ratio of 470 students to one school counselor doesn’t make sense in regard to carrying out the responsibilities assigned to that position. To ensure that all students are prepared for post-secondary transitioning, some schools incorporate advisor/advisee periods into the school day that can be used for college and career planning. This better utilizes the highly educated teacher workforce to serve as advisors while supporting the work of school counselors. School leaders could also think about leveraging school counselors to work with students while teachers are meeting. This is ideal time for counselors to work with large groups of students on academic and behavioral needs as well as college and career readiness activities.
- **Staggering the Work Day and Year:** It’s possible to reconfigure the work day and year for some groups of teachers to allow for extended learning time for students while still staying within contract constraints for teachers. The school year can be extended by providing in-depth courses once or twice a year that trump the regular schedule and teacher and support staff daily schedules can be adjusted making everyone available for core hours while allowing for the school day to be extended on both ends.



*Know your teacher’s contract*

*Many education leaders get stuck in the “we can’t” because of assumptions regarding the teacher contract. In one study of the country’s fifty largest districts’ negotiated agreements, policy researchers discovered that many had room to maneuver. Only 1/3 were very restrictive. In another review of contracts from another state, Vanderbilt University discovered that nearly every districts’ administrators had managerial prerogatives they thought they lacked.*

–Frederick M. Hess,  
author of *Cage Busting Leadership*

- **Learning Labs:** There are examples of schools that have successfully demonstrated the use of community partnerships to leverage learning time while also allowing for teacher collaboration time. In these types of settings, schools have a schedule that not only includes traditional class structures and times, but may also have one to two learning labs that are extended blocks where the staffing model includes students from a local college paired with a smaller number of teachers and more students. The same can also be accomplished with community volunteers, especially if the longer blocks are staggered throughout the week.
- **Integrated Subject Matter:** Closing gaps and disconnects for students is an important part of the learning process. For instance, rather than a student having World History for 45 minutes in the morning and then World Literature for 45 minutes in the afternoon, some schools are transitioning (especially as seat time requirements disappear and competency becomes the focus) to integrated coursework where teachers work as a team (Humanities or STEM) to plan co-curricular units that meet standards in both areas and then co-teach or team teach project-based units that cover all the content. This has a dramatic effect on the ability to use time differently in the school day.
- **Early Releases and Late Starts:** Many districts have piloted early release days and late starts with different levels of acceptance and success. Child care is always an issue in school districts that go this route. To make time for teacher collaboration, some schools allow for students to come to school at the regular time but use substitutes or other reassigned personnel to supervise students while teachers are engaged in professional learning.
- **Four-Day Week:** This topic often gets people excited because of the potential for saving money. It is logical to assume that a four-day week produces a 20 percent reduction in operating costs, but the average savings across the country for districts moving to a four-day week is less than five percent. Savings are lower because the greatest budget expense is personnel, and employees are still being paid 100 percent of their salaries. However, if used to create additional learning time for teachers and intervention time for students, the fifth day can become a real asset. On the fifth day, students may undertake online learning, experience an internship, or participate in a community program.
- **Substitute Teachers:** Some districts are reallocating budgets to purchase substitute teacher time. Again, this allows a school to provide professional learning and collaboration time on site while substitutes are supervising students. Some buildings also use substitute teachers after assessments to free up time for teachers to review student data.



### *Soliciting Student Feedback*

*Getting student feedback during the process of changing a school schedule is paramount. There needs to be a specific plan to do this and how the results will be communicated. Some school leaders do this informally or formally. School leaders can schedule focus group meetings during school lunch with representatives from each grade level. Leaders should ask specific and open ended questions:*

- 1. Do you get the support during the day when you are struggling in a class?*
- 2. How can we get students enrolled in more rigorous courses (advanced placement, dual enrollment)?*
- 3. How can we create a schedule that supports our students more?*

*It's also easy to use software like SurveyMonkey to collect responses from more of the student population. It is equally as important to continue to collect feedback during the implementation part of the process specifically year one and year two of the new schedule.*



## IMPLEMENTATION

As you redesign your school schedule, use the following checklist to create shared ownership and ensure the schedules can be implemented with fidelity.

- The priorities that were identified for the schedule were supported by data.
- The right stakeholders were involved in the process.
- Other schools and resources were explored during the process.
- The benefits of the new schedule are consistently and repeatedly communicated to students, teachers, and parents.
- A plan is created for developing and implementing the new schedule.
- Policies and procedures are aligned with the new schedule.
- The new schedule does what it is supposed to do. Evidence supports the kinds of changes that have been put in place.
- Mock student and staff schedules have been run before presenting to the entire staff.

## CONCLUSION

All change is disruptive, and changes to the master schedule are especially disruptive. The use of time can be challenging and yet mutually beneficial to a wide variety of stakeholders. It makes sense to take on this kind of work when there are challenges at your school that must be addressed and your team is ready to consider possibilities and undertake the hard work of creating a new educational paradigm for your school. As you begin this process it is essential that you go back again and again to the question of why.

- Why are you making this kind of change?
- Why will this change make the teaching and learning at your school more engaging, more effective, and more responsive to everyone's needs?

If you are clear on your purpose and have ownership from your staff around the purpose, then reconstructing your schedule, adjusting staff roles, and integrating technology is not only possible, it is manageable.

So get started. Bring together a group of school leaders and begin talking about what you would like to make possible with a new schedule. Enlisting a coach, facilitator or an outside party that can help your team address the sacred cows from a neutral perspective and lend ideas and expertise. Identify what is missing in your current schedule and ways to manipulate time to allow for different things to happen. Enlisting coaching will ensure that you are collecting and considering the right data, while providing an outside perspective that brings new knowledge to the opportunity and ensures you identify sacred cows and navigate past them to a better result.

Once you have commitment around these core purposes you can begin to talk about different scheduling options, including the advantages and disadvantages of each. These kinds of conversations are the lifeblood of your school. By convening and leading these conversations you are exercising leadership at the highest level. These actions will help to make life in your school more engaging and more productive for everyone.



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More scheduling tools and sample schedule at: [www.allthingsplc.com](http://www.allthingsplc.com)





## ABOUT BATTELLE FOR KIDS

Battelle for Kids is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides counsel and solutions to advance the development of human capital, the use of strategic measures, practices for improving educator effectiveness, and communication with all stakeholders. At the heart of this work is an unwavering focus on accelerating student growth.

Battelle for Kids' *SOAR* Leading & Learning Collaborative is comprised of nearly 100 rural, suburban, and urban districts across Ohio working together to stay ahead of the curve by innovating and collaborating; implementing high-growth practices with fidelity; influencing important educational issues to accelerate learning in Ohio; and impacting student learning by enhancing teacher, leader, and organizational effectiveness.

## ABOUT GENERATION SCHOOLS NETWORK™

Generation Schools is a nonprofit that transforms public schools, adding up to 30 percent more learning without increasing costs or teacher workload. This model creates room for revolutionary programming and curricula that prepares students for success—in school, work, and life.



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