CONNECTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN DEPTH

Finding Time for Collaborative Planning

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INTRODUCTION

In Igniting the Learning Engine: How school systems accelerate teacher effectiveness and student growth through Connected Professional Learning, we profiled four school systems that, with an intensive focus on improving the quality of instruction through professional learning, have seen above-average results with a relatively high-need student population. These systems have replaced traditional professional development efforts, such as one-off workshops and general coaching, with a more strategic model that includes:

- **Rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments:** System leaders ensure that all schools have access to rigorous and coherent curricula, assessments, and other instructional resources, aligned to college- and career-ready standards.

- **Content-focused, expert-led collaboration:** School leaders organize teachers into teams, led by content experts, that have the time, support, and culture of trust and learning to collaborate on instruction.

- **Frequent, growth-oriented feedback for teachers:** Teacher leaders, coaches, or other content experts provide regular, non-evaluative feedback to teachers that helps them improve instructional practice.

These school systems made these common, research-backed practices powerful by integrating the elements in one cohesive strategy, tightly connected to the work teachers do every day. For that reason, we call this approach "Connected Professional Learning."

Making the shift from traditional professional development to Connected Professional Learning implies significant change both at the system level and in schools. Ideally, school leaders can build from rigorous, standards-aligned curricula and count on a group of talented educators who are invested in the growth process. But even in the best of circumstances, one stubborn challenge can confound even the most seasoned principal:

"How do we find enough time for meaningful collaborative planning?"

In more than 10 years of experience working with leaders in over 40 school systems across the country, we have come to deeply understand the time challenge in schools. Building a strategic master schedule requires principals to balance diverse student needs and a range of teacher skills in the context of a student day that can include as little as five hours of focused learning time. The task is often complicated further by collective bargaining agreements with highly prescriptive stipulations, staff and coverage shortages, transportation schedule requirements, and limited resources.

In this brief, we provide context on how American teachers currently spend their time and offer practical strategies for how principals can create more collaborative planning time. We hope these models inspire school and district leaders to create this crucial condition for Connected Professional Learning—one that helps improve the quality of instruction and, ultimately, outcomes for students.

HOW DO TEACHERS USE THEIR TIME?

American teachers spend far more time in the classroom, and far less time collaborating, than their peers in many other countries.[1] High-achieving school systems, such as those in British Columbia, Shanghai, Singapore, and Hong Kong, dedicate as much as 35 percent of teachers' time to "working in teams to improve lessons."[2] Research has highlighted how collaborative planning impacts student learning: according to one study, "Whether or not teachers collaboratively analyze student assessment data is a strong predictor of achievement gains across math and ELA."[3]

To understand how this plays out for American teachers, we looked at a representative sample of nine large urban districts where ERS has worked.* We found that in those districts, teachers spent only 2 percent of their time in collaborative planning, or about 45 minutes per week.[4] Initial responses to our online Connected Professional Learning diagnostic assessment corroborate this experience: more than half of respondents say teachers in their schools have fewer than 60 minutes for collaboration each week, while less than 10 percent say teachers benefit from at least 90 minutes weekly.

American teachers *want* to collaborate—a recent survey of more than 6,300 teachers, conducted by Learning Forward, revealed a strong preference for collaborative learning during the school day. But just 25 percent of those respondents said that the majority of their professional learning takes place during school hours.[5]

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* This is based on data from nine urban districts that ERS has worked with in the past, each of which gave us access to financial, human capital, course scheduling, and demographic data. While this is not a statistically significant or randomized sample, it does reflect the practices of a highly relevant cohort of peer districts and puts the case studies in context. ERS draws on over 20 years of experience working with more than 40 districts nationwide to inform our understanding of "typical" district practice.

For [Igniting the Learning Engine](#), we studied professional learning practices in three urban school districts—Duval County Public Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools, and Sanger Unified School District—and one charter network, Achievement First. In all four school systems, teachers are able to dedicate at least **90 consecutive minutes each week** for collaboration among "shared-content" teams, i.e., teams that teach the same or very similar content, as opposed to those that teach the same group of students ("shared-student" teams). Given its greater flexibility, Achievement First provides as much as 300 weekly minutes for teacher collaboration.

FIGURE 1 MINUTES PER WEEK IN COLLABORATIVE PLANNING, ACROSS DIFFERENT TYPES OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS
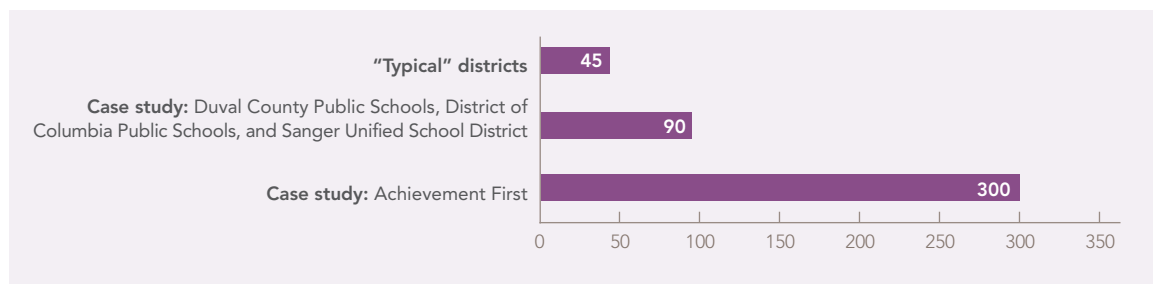
Of course, teams need more than just time with peers who teach the same content—they require expert support to guide the team through rigorous lessons, as well as access to student data, sample agendas, and protocols that guide the conversation. Teams also need to operate within a professional adult culture that encourages learning and sharing.

But without enough time, these other substantial investments often fall flat. School and system leaders should start by assessing how teachers currently spend their time. This can reveal how much time teachers actually spend doing things that may not support their core work of instruction, such as duties or generic PD activities. This also creates a baseline for making a case for change and measuring progress. Armed with data on current use of time, leaders can get to work creating schedules that maximize effective collaboration and support professional learning.

SIX STRATEGIES FOR FINDING SUFFICIENT TIME FOR COLLABORATION

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	CONSIDERATIONS
1) Back-to-Back	Stack two blocks of planning time together	• May mean teachers do not have a planning block one day a week • Schools must ensure teachers have duty-free lunch or other noninstructional time every day
2) Banking Time	Reduce planning time on a few days to increase time on another day	• Useful when teachers have at least 40 minutes of planning time per day, to ensure shortened blocks are still useful
3) Beginning and End of Day	Reorganize time that teachers have at the beginning and end of the day into more team planning time	• Useful when teachers are mandated to arrive before and depart after students • Staff may need to arrive earlier or stay later on certain days under this model
4) Recess and Lunch	Schedule noninstructional blocks like recess and lunch next to planning time, and cover those activities with other adults	• Schools must have staff to cover recess/lunch • Schools must ensure that teachers still have sufficient time for eating lunch
5) Larger Specials	Create larger specials classes so that fewer specials classes can cover more core teachers' time	• Works best when specials are not already at or near class-size limit
6) Enrichment Periods	Create enrichment or intervention periods, covered by other adults, to allow teachers to plan	• Useful when schools have staff or community partners to cover enrichment periods effectively —i.e., as an academic benefit, not a time filler

1) Back-to-Back: Stacking two blocks of planning time together

Many schools follow this pattern: one planning period per day, with one of those periods per week dedicated to collaborative planning. If a typical school has 45- to 55-minute periods, that adds up to 225 to 275 minutes of planning per week. This time can be organized differently—and more strategically—to give teachers one extended block to plan. One way to do this is to schedule two planning periods back-to-back on one day, as in Figure 2 (next page). This is achieved by scheduling students for two periods of specials on one day and no specials on another day.

FIGURE 2 SAMPLE 2ND GRADE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

55-min periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:15-9:10 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:10-10:05 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:05-11:00 AM	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
11:00-11:55 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
11:55-12:30 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:30-1:25 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
1:25-2:20 PM	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	Science/Soc. Studies
2:20-3:15 PM	Science	Open Circle	Social Studies	Specials	Open Circle

This strategy works best when periods like lunch or recess can be covered by paraprofessionals, aides, or other school staff, thus giving teachers some break time even on non-planning days. It is also important for teams to have established a culture that is truly collaborative, productive, and focused, such that teachers can plan several days effectively in that one longer period.

Secondary schools could consider another option—changing their overall schedules to gain additional planning time. For example, a school on a six-period schedule could shift to a seven-period schedule, keep the percentage of teaching time the same, and gain flexibility to have two planning periods back-to-back.

Switching from 6 to 7 Periods to Increase Collaborative Planning Time

From:

- 6-period day
- 83% teaching time (teach 5 of 6 periods every day)
- 65 min of individual planning time 4 days/week
- 65 min of collaborative planning time 1 day/week

To:

- 7-period day
- 83% teaching time (teach 6 periods 4 days/week and 5 periods 1 day/week)
- 55 min of individual planning time 4 days/week
- 110 min of collaborative planning time 1 day/week

FIGURE 3 SAMPLE MIDDLE SCHOOL ELA TEACHER SCHEDULE

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

With 6 Periods

65-min periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Period 1	ELA 1	ELA 1	ELA 1	ELA 1	ELA 1
Period 2	ELA 2	ELA 2	ELA 2	ELA 2	ELA 2
Period 3	ELA 3	ELA 3	ELA 3	ELA 3	ELA 3
Period 4	ELA 4	ELA 4	ELA 4	ELA 4	ELA 4
Period 5	ELA 5	ELA 5	ELA 5	ELA 5	ELA 5
Period 6	Planning	Planning	Planning	Planning	Planning

With 7 Periods

55-min periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Period 1	ELA 1	ELA 1	ELA 1	ELA 1	ELA 1
Period 2	ELA 2	ELA 2	ELA 2	ELA 2	ELA 2
Period 3	ELA 3	ELA 3	ELA 3	ELA 3	ELA 3
Period 4	ELA 4	ELA 4	ELA 4	ELA 4	ELA 4
Period 5	ELA 5	ELA 5	ELA 5	ELA 5	ELA 5
Period 6	ELA Intervention	Planning	ELA Intervention	ELA Intervention	ELA Intervention
Period 7	Planning	Planning	Planning	Planning	Planning

Depending on how students spend their time during the newly added 7th period (e.g., ELA, math, or some other subject), schools may need to change their overall mix of teachers. For example, if the 7th period was exclusively used to add an ELA intervention period for all students, more ELA teachers would be required, as students would then be spending more time in ELA and ELA intervention than they were in the previous schedule. Subsequently, fewer teachers would be required for other subjects, and the total number of teachers would remain the same.

Strategies in Action: Example #1

The School

The Curley K-8 School in Boston Public Schools serves approximately 900 students, nearly half of whom qualify for federal free or reduced-price lunch benefits.

The Strategy

Many Boston schools, including the Curley, have a bit of an unusual schedule—each grade-level team has **six** 55-minute blocks of planning time each week instead of five.* Principal Katherine Grassa found that 55-minute blocks were less than ideal for the deep conversation, data review, practice, and group work required to fundamentally improve the quality and rigor of instruction. So she created an extended, 110-minute planning block by scheduling two planning periods back-to-back. Students attend two specials courses in a row to make this planning time possible.

FIGURE 4 THE CURLEY SCHOOL, SAMPLE 5TH GRADE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

55-min periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:15-8:55 AM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
8:55-9:50 AM	Specials	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:50-10:45 AM	Math	Writing	Writing	Writing	Specials
10:45-11:55 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
11:55-12:40 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:40-1:15 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
1:15-2:10 PM	Math	Social Studies	Specials	Specials	Reading
2:10-3:05 PM	Open Circle	Specials	Social Studies	Specials	Open Circle

* Prior to 2017-18, teachers at the Curley had five 55-minute blocks of planning time. When Boston Public Schools implemented Extended Learning Time in a subset of schools, teachers were provided with an additional planning period, which by contract has to be "teacher-facilitated" (vs. administrative team-facilitated).

2) Banking Time: Reduce planning time on a few days to increase time on another day

Another way that schools can creatively repurpose some of their weekly planning time for collaboration is by "banking" time, that is, by reducing planning time on some days to create a longer collaborative planning block one day each week. For example, an elementary school with 55-minute planning periods could shorten daily planning on four days to 45 minutes. In doing so, 40 minutes of planning time is "banked" that could be added together to create a 95-minute planning block once a week. The overall amount of time dedicated to both instructional time and planning time each week remains constant.

FIGURE 5   SCHEMATIC OF "BANKING" TIME TO CREATE A LONGER BLOCK FOR COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

FROM	TO	
5 days a week: 55 minutes of planning time	**4 days a week:** 45 minutes of planning time	**1 day a week:** 95 minutes of planning time
Planning (55 minutes)	Planning (45 minutes)	Planning (95 minutes)
Instruction (165 minutes)	Instruction (175 minutes)	Instruction (125 minutes)
Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)
Instruction (150 minutes)	Instruction (150 minutes)	Instruction (150 minutes)

3) Beginning and End of Day: Reorganize time that teachers have at the beginning and end of the day into more team planning time

In many schools, teachers are contractually obligated to arrive before and depart after students—as little as five or as many as 30 minutes longer than the student day.* For example, teachers may have responsibilities for 15 minutes before instruction begins and 15 minutes after instruction ends. Over the week, this could add up to as much as 150 minutes of additional time teachers are at school where they may not have instructional responsibilities with students.

* We know that most teachers stay at school longer than their contractually obligated time—to make copies, organize their rooms, call parents, or informally talk with colleagues. We refer here to time that teachers must be present—and might be sometimes taken up with duties like monitoring pickup.

These 150 minutes can be a potential source of planning time for teachers. In the example below, all teachers were required to arrive 15 minutes before students and were allowed to leave 15 minutes after. By shortening each block to 10 minutes at the beginning and at the end of the day, a school could "regain" 10 minutes a day, or 50 minutes over the course of the week. If added at the end of the day on top of the regular 10-minute "duty" block, and placed next to the regular 55-minute planning period, this could result in a nearly two-hour block of planning time one day a week.

FIGURE 6 SCHEMATIC OF HOW TO ADJUST TEACHER TIME AT BEGINNING AND END OF DAY

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

FROM	**TO**	
5 days a week: 55 minutes of planning time and 30 minutes of duty per day	**4 days a week:** 55 minutes of planning time and 20 minutes of duty per day	**1 day a week:** 115 minutes of planning time and 10 minutes of duty
Duty (15 minutes)	Duty (10 minutes)	Duty (10 minutes)
Instruction (205 minutes)	Instruction (205 minutes)	Instruction (205 minutes)
Recess/Lunch (45 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (45 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (45 minutes)
Instruction (115 minutes)	Instruction (115 minutes)	Instruction (115 minutes)
Planning (55 minutes)	Planning (55 minutes)	**Planning (115 minutes)** 55-min original planning period +10 minutes repurposed duty time + 50 minutes repurposed duty time from throughout the week
Duty (15 minutes)	Duty (10 minutes)	

The example above shows what this could look like for one team of teachers. A school could apply this strategy for all teams, alternating what day their planning takes place to ensure there is sufficient coverage for arrival and dismissal. School leaders may want to pair this with other strategies, like scheduling planning blocks together or using other staff as coverage to create even longer blocks.

The overall trade-off to this approach is that on the day dedicated for planning, teachers will be required to stay at school for an extended day—in this example, eight hours compared to the typical 7.5 hours. In many schools we have worked with, teachers ask for this change as long as it creates opportunities for high-quality group work.

One elementary school that we have worked with found that it had "extra" time in the beginning and end of the day that it did not even realize was there. When the principal took a hard look at her schedule, she realized that the school day was starting 15 minutes later than it should have and was ending 15 minutes early. Why? Because the school culture had evolved to let parents routinely bring students late and pick them up early. The next year, the school leaders and staff worked together to change expectations among parents about start and end times—and then recaptured 30 minutes a day that could be put toward collaborative planning.[6]

4) Recess and Lunch: Schedule noninstructional blocks like recess and lunch next to planning time, and cover those activities with other adults

Lunch and recess can provide a great opportunity to add planning time to teachers' schedules. First, school leaders should look for opportunities to proactively schedule planning time next to recess or lunch blocks, creating an extended period for planning. Instead of staffing those noninstructional blocks with teachers, consider using paraprofessionals, aides, social workers, "specials" teachers, assistant principals, or even volunteers, such as parents or high school students. This works particularly well if the school can schedule lunch, recess, and a planning period in a row.

This strategy works best when schools can pair it with a schedule rotation so that all teachers will be able to make use of it for collaborative planning one day a week.

FIGURE 7 SAMPLE 2ND GRADE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

55 min periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:15-9:10 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:10-10:05 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:05-11:00 AM	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
11:00-11:55 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
11:55-12:30 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:30-1:25 PM	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials
1:25-2:20 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
2:20-3:15 PM	Science	Open Circle	Social Studies	Science/Soc Studies	Open Circle

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Strategies in Action: Example #2

The School

Tallulah Charter School in the Delta region of northeastern Louisiana serves about 400 students in PreK through 9th grade, nearly all of whom quality for free or reduced-price lunch. A stand-alone charter school in a town with fewer than 10,000 people, Tallulah Charter operates with severely limited resources.

The Strategy

In the elementary school, each grade of teachers plans collaboratively one day a week, on the day when their students are in computer class. Tallulah Charter does not have enough funds to pay for separate specials teachers, so homeroom teachers cover art, music, and other specials on the four other days. Tallulah Charter CEO Dr. Patricia Chandler extended this planning time by assigning paraprofessionals or aides to monitor students during the 15-minute recess period that precedes planning. This gives teachers a full 60 minutes to meet—a 33 percent increase in time.

Though this is less than the 90 consecutive minutes per week we see as best practice, Tallulah Charter has demonstrated that schools can still extend planning time with limited resources. Over a 36-week year, 15 minutes per week adds up to a total of nine hours. This is equivalent to a full-day PD workshop for every teacher at no extra cost—and is likely tied to teacher improvement much more than the typical one-off workshop.

Example #2 continued

FIGURE 8 TALLULAH CHARTER SCHOOL, SAMPLE 4TH GRADE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

Variable periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:30-8:00 AM	Teacher Arrival	Teacher Arrival	Teacher Arrival	Teacher Arrival	Teacher Arrival
8:00-8:20 AM	Announcements	Announcements	Announcements	Announcements	Announcements
8:20-9:00 AM	ELA	ELA	ELA	ELA	ELA
9:00-9:40 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
9:40-10:00 AM	Read Aloud	Read Aloud	Read Aloud	Read Aloud	Read Aloud
10:00-10:15 AM	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10:15-11:00 AM	Computer	Library	Art	Music	Projects
11:00-12:00 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
12:00-12:35 PM	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess	Lunch & Recess
12:35-1:50 PM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
1:50-2:20 PM	Phys Ed	Phys Ed	Phys Ed	Phys Ed	Phys Ed
2:20-3:20 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Social Studies
3:20-3:30 PM	Prep for Dismissal	Prep for Dismissal	Prep for Dismissal	Prep for Dismissal	Prep for Dismissal

5) Larger Specials: Create larger specials classes so that fewer specials classes can cover more core teachers' time

Many schools that are strapped for resources may have a limited number of specials teachers. Other schools might have a "bubble" grade—that is to say, a grade with more students than in others. Either of these situations can make it difficult to find coverage for planning time, where there may not be enough specials teachers to cover for the core teachers. For example, in a school with teams of four core teachers and only three elective teachers, it seems as if only three core teachers can meet together at a time. However, if the school can slightly raise class sizes in the specials classes, those three teachers may be able to cover for all four core teachers. An example of this is below.

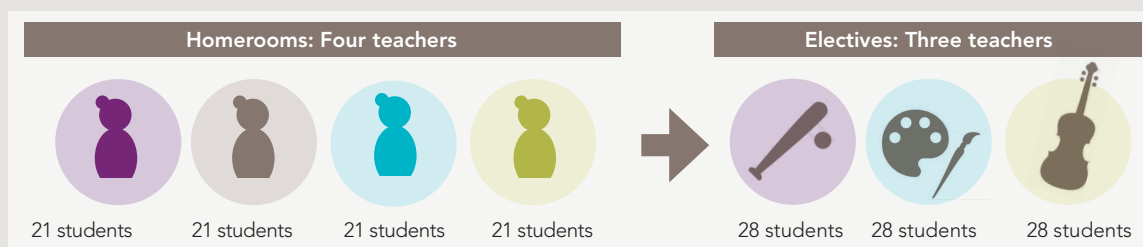## Strategies in Action: Example #3

The School

McClure Elementary School in Tulsa Public Schools serves roughly 460 students in PreK to 6th grade. In 2015-16, 70 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 18 percent were English language learners.*

The Strategy

As she reviewed her allotment for the 2017-18 school year, Principal Katy Jiminez noticed a challenge. Her projected kindergarten enrollment was at 84 students; based on district staffing policies and potential shifts in enrollment once the school year began, McClure would be offering four kindergarten homerooms. But she only had the budget to have three specials teachers. Without a creative solution, this meant that only three of her kindergarten teachers would be able to plan at the same time.

To make it possible for all four kindergarten teachers to plan together, Principal Jimenez "pooled" their homerooms during specials time, creating three specials classes of 28 students each. To support the higher class sizes during specials (28 vs. 21 in homerooms), Principal Jimenez assigned existing paraprofessionals to support these classrooms during kindergartners' specials time.

FIGURE 9 EXAMPLE OF "POOLED" HOMEROOMS

Homerooms: Four teachers					Electives: Three teachers		
21 students	21 students	21 students	21 students		28 students	28 students	28 students

* In 2016-17, Tulsa Public Schools introduced the Community Eligibility Provision, under which all students receive breakfast and lunch. This means that it's hard to know exactly how many students actually qualify for the federal school lunch program based on their parents' incomes. However, the demographics of the school did not change significantly from 2015-16. See the TPS' school profiles for demographics.

6) **Enrichment Periods:** Create enrichment or intervention periods, covered by other adults, to allow teachers to plan

Many schools already have an enrichment/intervention block, which may be staffed by teachers or paraprofessionals. Depending on local labor contracts, student need, and curricula, school leaders could potentially staff this time with a wide array of trusted adults, including paraprofessionals/aides, social workers, media specialists, or instructional coaches. Moreover, some schools can opt to create time for clubs, in-depth projects, internships, community service, or technology-supported instruction, all of which extend student learning, create investment in school, and provide real-world skills. Any of these enrichment opportunities could also be staffed through partnerships with community organizations. By adding these adults into the mix, schools may be able to provide reasonable class sizes.

This strategy works best if the school can schedule this enrichment block next to a current planning period, potentially achieving 90 minutes.

FIGURE 10 SAMPLE 6TH GRADE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Light green = Individual teacher planning time   Dark green = Team collaborative planning time

55-min periods	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:15-9:10 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
9:10-10:05 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:05-11:00 AM	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
11:00-11:55 AM	Science	Science	Science	Science	Science
11:55-12:30 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:30-1:25 PM	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment
1:25-2:20 PM	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials
2:20-3:15 PM	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts

Strategies in Action: Example #4

The School:

Hamilton Elementary School in Tulsa Public Schools is a PreK-6 school serving 550 students. In 2015-16, 55 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 40 percent of Hamilton's students were English language learners.[7]

The Strategy

At Hamilton Elementary, grade-level teachers already met weekly. For the 2017-18 school year, Principal Tera Carr wanted to make time for her vertical teams to meet, to align content across grades.

To create this time, Principal Carr looked at ways to use her existing staff a little differently. Hamilton added 40 minutes of club time at the end of each Friday. Clubs are led by an array of staff members—including paraprofessionals, special education and English language development teachers, four related arts teachers, and the school social worker, guidance counselor, and front-office staff. With these 21 staff members, group sizes for clubs remain at roughly 35 students per adult. Moreover, community organizations like the Girl Scouts, as well as high school students with an earlier end time, come to the school to lower group sizes even further. While this is a bit larger than a typical class, the size of the group matches the activity—a soccer club might be bigger than a robotics club, for example.

To achieve this schedule, instructional time is reduced by 10 minutes per period on Fridays. The school has chosen to make this trade-off to allow teachers more time to align instruction, as well as to give students access to engaging activities that keep them motivated to stay in school.

Example #4 continued

FIGURE 11 HAMILTON ELEMENTARY, SAMPLE 3RD GRADE SCHEDULE

Dark green = Cross-team vertical planning

Monday-Thursday Schedule
Arrival/Breakfast and Mindfulness/SEL
Specials **(90 minutes)**
Learning Block 1 **(70 minutes)**
Learning Block 2 **(70 minutes)**
Open Lunch/Recess
Learning Block 3 **(70 minutes)**
Learning Block 4 **(70 minutes)**
Gratitude/Close Out **(10 minutes)**
Dismissal **(10 minutes)**

Friday Schedule
Arrival/Breakfast and Mindfulness/SEL
Specials **(80 minutes)**
Learning Block 1 **(60 minutes)**
Learning Block 2 **(60 minutes)**
Open Lunch/Recess
Learning Block 3 **(60 minutes)**
Learning Block 4 **(60 minutes)**
Gratitude/Close Out/Transition to Club Time **(20 minutes)**
Club Time **(40 minutes)**
Dismissal **(10 minutes)**

CONCLUSION

Teachers, principals, and system leaders regularly feel the pinch of not having enough—especially when it comes to creating time for teachers to collaborate. Armed with alternative approaches for creating sufficient, shared-content collaborative blocks, school leaders can make it possible for teachers to meet as teams, look at student data, review and refine upcoming lessons, and share feedback that has a direct impact on instruction. These are the building blocks of achieving high-level learning for all students.

We want to learn from you! How do YOU build sufficient planning blocks into your school's master schedule? Send your sample schedule and an explanation of why it works for you to contact@erstrategies.org, *and we'll post it to the Professional Learning Toolkit for others to learn from.*

TAKE ACTION

Finding time for collaborative planning is just one part of creating a strategic professional learning system that is deeply connected to the work teachers do every day. School system and school leaders can:

- **Assess:** Take the Teacher Professional Learning Diagnostic Assessment to compare your school system's practices to those of leading-edge districts.

- **Learn more:** Read Igniting the Learning Engine to learn how curriculum, collaboration, and feedback underpin connected professional learning.

- **Delve deep:** Learn about what other school systems have done to implement more effective professional learning in these in-depth case studies.

- **Calculate your use of time:** Analyze your teacher time spent on professional growth with the System Self-Assessment and the Spending Calculator—part of our Professional Growth & Support series.

- **Redesign your school schedule:** Use these Strategic Scheduling Tools to maximize time where your students and teachers need it most.

Endnotes

1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) – 2013 Results*. http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/talis-2013-results.htm.

2. Jensen, B.; Sonnemann, J.; Roberts-Hull, K.; and Hunter, A. *Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems*. National Center on Education and the Economy. January 2016. http://ncee.org/beyond-pd/.

3. Ronfeldt, M.; Owens Farmer, S.; McQueen, K.; and Grissom, J. A. *Teacher Collaboration in Instructional Teams and Student Achievement*. American Educational Research Journal. June 2015. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831215585562.

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