

## Scheduling Considerations

*This resource provides examples, with embedded guidance, on how to think about scheduling classes and lessons so that teachers have the time they need to meet the goals of the curriculum. There are different implications for different materials. These suggestions outline guidance and considerations across materials, but decisions should be made with the specific curriculum in mind.*

### Common Scenarios

- The instructional block is **too short**. For example, the curriculum is designed for 90-minute lessons and the instructional block is only 60 minutes. In this scenario, districts have these options:
  - Teach part of the lesson one day, and finish it the next day. With this option, educators will have to make strategic decisions about where to segment the lesson so that there is 1) some kind of closure on the first day and 2) on the following day, an opportunity to review and connect to the previous day's learning.
    - Upside: Schools' schedules and instructional blocks don't have to change.
    - Downside: Some curricula don't lend themselves to spliced content, and lessons cut in the middle can feel disjointed. Students may be asked to learn a concept one day, but won't be able to apply it until the next day, which may hinder learning.
  - Lengthen the instructional block.
    - Upside: Students and teachers will have the time they need to experience lessons the way they were designed.
    - Downside: Changing schedules can be cumbersome, and there may be a domino effect. Changes to the instructional block in one subject may affect timing for other subjects, as well as important school structures like lunch, recess, or related arts.
- The instructional block is **too long**. For example, the curriculum is designed for 60-minute lessons and the instructional block is 90 minutes. In this scenario, districts have these options:
  - Teach multiple lessons or lesson parts in a single day. With this option, educators will have to make strategic decisions about how to combine multiple lessons, providing an opportunity to adequately close one lesson before introducing another. Educators will also have to decide how to best assign homework if multiple lessons are taught in one day.
    - Upside: Schools' schedules and instructional blocks don't have to change.
    - Downside: Figuring out how to best combine lessons requires deep knowledge of the curriculum, because it will likely involve cutting parts of one or both lessons. Rarely will two lessons fit neatly into one instructional block. When trimming content,

educators will have to know how to consolidate material without losing key concepts and practice opportunities or diluting rigor.

- Shorten the instructional block.
  - Upside: Students and teachers will have the time they need to experience lessons the way they were designed.
  - Downside: Changing schedules can be cumbersome, and there may be a domino effect. Changes to the instructional block in one subject may affect timing for other subjects, as well as important school structures like lunch, recess, or related arts.

### **Considerations for combining or splitting lessons:**

- Check to see if the developer has guidance on pacing.
- Think back to your curriculum study and the pacing guidance and use guidance that your team created. You can use the same guiding principles to make decisions about how to combine or split lessons based on the scheduling you land on. These decisions should all be aligned and work together to support implementation with integrity.
- Consider the key ideas and build of the unit and lesson to figure out how to utilize your block. Sometimes old structures around centers and intervention can be used for extension work and independent practice, giving additional space for Tier I instruction.

*The examples below illustrate how some districts responded to scheduling challenges.*

### **Example 1: High School Math**

The district adopted a new math curriculum with lessons designed for 45 minutes. Each lesson is designed to follow one of four lesson structures. For example, some lessons follow a traditional sequence where the teacher models problems and then students practice, while others take the shape of a Socratic seminar.

The district currently has 90-minute math blocks. District educators decided to have teachers teach two lessons in each block. Some educators worried that students would get burned out if they were asked to do the same thing for 90 minutes. The district convened a group of educators from each grade level to look at the lesson sequence and determine if there were any days when students would be asked to repeat the same lesson structure for consecutive lessons (i.e., participate in two back-to-back Socratic seminars). In the handful of instances when this happened, the team of educators proposed alternatives for how teachers could cover the same content presented in the curriculum, but employ alternative teaching methods to help keep students engaged.

The district also provided teachers with guidance on how to assign homework when two lessons were taught in a day and how to provide appropriate closure to the first

lesson before beginning the second lesson. Closure strategies included having students move places or change seating arrangements to signal a start to a new lesson, as well as having students predict what the next lesson could be and how it would connect to the lesson they just studied.

### **Example 2: Middle School Math**

The district adopted a new math curriculum with lessons designed for 45 minutes. The district currently has 75-minute math blocks. At first, the district decided to keep the 75-minute block and ask teachers to teach two lessons, cutting down parts of the lessons if needed to make them fit in the shorter time frame. Teachers expressed lots of concern about this proposal – they worried about not being able to get through lessons and compromising the rigor of content to accommodate the schedule. Instead, the teachers proposed switching to 60-minute math lessons. Teachers would teach one full lesson in the 60 minutes and use the remaining time for small group instruction. Students not working with the teacher in the small group could work on homework.

Changing the math block from 75 to 60 minutes had a potential impact on other subject areas. The district considered two alternatives. The first was to make all four academic subject blocks 60 minutes (ELA, math, science, social studies) and use the extra 15 minutes from each class to create a new 60-minute homeroom where students could work on homework and teachers could work with small groups. The second choice was for the other subjects to keep their 75 minutes and for the math teacher to do 15 minutes of additional instruction in a non-math subject that the district thought was important, like test-taking strategies or study skills. To choose, the district asked all middle school teachers to vote.

### **Example 3: Elementary ELA**

The district adopted a new ELA curriculum with lessons designed for 90 minutes. The first 30 minutes of instruction focused on foundational skills and the remaining 60 minutes was devoted to reading and writing about texts. The 30-minute foundational skill lesson needed to come first because the subsequent reading lesson provided opportunities for students to apply foundational skills in context.

Educators in the district decided that ideally the 90-minute block would be uninterrupted, but at a minimum the final 60 minutes needed to be continuous because it was critical for students to connect the reading and writing activities.

School leaders identified a few classrooms whose current schedules did not accommodate either 90 or 60 uninterrupted minutes. Accordingly, leaders adjusted their related arts and lunch/recess schedules. For example, 2nd grade originally had an hour of class time in the morning, an hour-long related arts class, and then 45 minutes in class before lunch. Leaders changed the schedule so that 2nd grade could have the first related arts block, and in turn, enough time before lunch to fit in their

ELA lessons. 4th grade was also given a later lunch time so they could fit the 30-minute foundational skill block in before their related arts class, leaving enough time for the 60-minute reading and writing lesson before they went to lunch.

School leaders also worked with special education teachers to ensure that all students experienced core instruction and no students were pulled out during the new ELA schedule.