



## Recommendation Three

### Time

"Students learn in different ways and at different rates. Middle grades students need enough time and help to meet more rigorous, consistent standards . . ."1

**Recommendation 3 — Time.** Institute flexible schedules that provide recommended and required instructional minutes for core academic classes and accelerated interventions. Provide sufficient time before, during, and after school so that each student has access to additional academic and interest-based classes and opportunities to meet social and personal needs. Schedule regular common planning time for professional learning communities to analyze student data, coordinate instruction, and communicate with families.

Time is one of the Recommendations in the Focus Area on Academic Excellence.

## Contents

- The Importance of Time in Middle Grades
- Time for All Courses
- Recommended and Required Instructional Minutes
- Time to Meet Student Needs
  - ◆ Time for multiple opportunities to succeed
  - ◆ Time for tutoring and mentoring
  - ◆ Time for accelerated academic interventions
  - ◆ Time for before- and after-school programs
  - ◆ Time for counseling and mental health
  - ◆ Time for electives
  - ◆ Time for clubs and co-curricular experiences
  - ◆ Time for celebrations
  - ◆ Transportation issues
- Time for Professional Learning Community Activities
  - ◆ Data review to improve instruction
  - ◆ Teacher preparation
  - ◆ Special projects
  - ◆ Building community through celebrations
- Implications of School Schedules for Teacher Contracts
  - ◆ Master schedules
  - ◆ Six-period days
  - ◆ Seven- or eight-period day
  - ◆ Block schedules
    - ▶ Four by four block
    - ▶ Rotating block
  - ◆ Other schedule variations
- Conclusion

**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup>Academic Achievement in the Middle Grades: What Does the Research Tell Us? (PDF; Outside Source), Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Regional Education Board, 2003, 19.

[Back to Top](#)



## The Importance of Time in Middle Grades

Time is a critical element in driving academic excellence. Students who enter the middle grades without grade-level skills face serious challenges as academic rigor intensifies. Many children who have struggled during elementary school may need longer school days and school years, intensive academic interventions, and extra time for services such as tutoring. Students who do not experience grade-level skills challenges may need time built into their schedules for additional academic acceleration and enrichment.

Given the number of rigorous standards in the middle grades and the reality of teaching the adolescent learner, there is simply not enough time in current instructional models for interventions, when necessary, and for meeting all students' academic, physical, emotional, and social needs. As a result, flexible schedules and creative solutions at each school site are necessary to meet the needs of students. Current funding levels and collective bargaining agreements generally preclude the option of longer days. In fact, collective bargaining agreements dictate much of how time is used in schools, making collaboration and collegial thinking much more important.

Time in middle schools is also affected by adolescent development. Young adolescents are subject to hormones that influence mood and excitability. At times students exhibit critical thought and are reflective, analytical, and introspective. At other times, adolescents are erratic and inconsistent in their behavior. Social and emotional concerns are a huge priority. They can override academic learning that should be taking place. Master calendars that have support classes built into the daily schedule can give students the repetition and the focus they need. Elective classes in daily schedules expose adolescents to new stimuli in social settings.

To maximize limited instructional time during the day, the school culture must reinforce that students are in their seats ready to work from bell to bell. Teachers can learn to use the beginning minutes of each class for students to copy agendas, write in journals, or solve a problem. Ending minutes can be used to reinforce homework.

In *Tracking an Emerging Movement: A Report on Expanded-Time Schools in America (2009)* (Outside Source), the National Center on Time & Learning found a statistically significant (moderate) association between the number of instructional minutes per day and student performance for grades seven and ten in both mathematics and English-language arts. The report's authors found, among other things, that middle grades students in expanded time schools spend on average 1,500 minutes per week in core academic classes—the equivalent to five hours per day spread evenly across the four core subjects. The report includes an appendix that alphabetically lists the schools represented in the study.

According to the Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage (STW-TCS) program, effective middle grades programs center on communities where all stakeholders are learning all the time (students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community partners). This focus on learning is one of the reasons that professional learning communities are also central to the middle grades philosophy. Professional learning communities and the innovative ways they use scheduling is what allows help to be provided in order for all students to succeed. Among other things, flexible scheduling allows time for:

- Students to gain mastery (reteaching, tutoring, and interventions)
- Teachers to plan instruction and common assessments and to analyze the results (link to the section on "Lead data analysis" in Recommendation 9—Leadership)
- Intervention classes and other applicable classes
- Electives for all students
- Clubs, celebrations, and co-curricular activities
- Advisory classes that increase student-adult relationships

Finding a solution to the problem of more time in school often conflicts with:

- Long-held traditions based on the agrarian and nineteenth-century calendar (summers and afternoons off for chores at home)
- Lack of funding to hire more teachers for longer periods of time
- Collective bargaining contracts (that stipulate the length of a school day, require prescribed class periods, and use of preparation periods)

A Massachusetts research study on extended time arrived at the following conclusions about time in the middle grades:

- Regardless of the specific scheduling approach, the additional hours generally translate into greater academic support for all students and a greater variety of enrichment activities.<sup>1</sup>

- At the successful Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) Academies (a network of 45 charter middle schools throughout the country), students spend approximately 60 percent more time in school than do students at conventional middle schools.<sup>2</sup>

In the typical middle school, students have different teachers for each subject, and the class period lasts about 50 minutes. Many teachers and administrators in the study's extended-time schools believe 50-minute class periods are too short to cover the required material, answer all student questions, and ensure that students fully grasp the concepts presented. They therefore lengthen their classes to 90 or even 120 minutes.<sup>3</sup>

Giving academic or intervention programs time to take effect is another important aspect in middle grades reform.

Simply put, for programs to achieve positive outcomes for students, they must be chosen thoughtfully—keeping in mind local needs and contexts—and implemented willingly and faithfully. **They must also be given time to succeed** [emphasis added]. The research evidence on program effectiveness indicates that achieving positive results, particularly at the level of schools and districts, often takes years. Some evidence indicates that the longer a program is in place, the more effective it is likely to become.<sup>4</sup>

To incorporate the essential elements of standards-based middle grades reform, high-impact middle schools create flexible schedules that make time for team teaching, differentiated instruction, remedial support programs, accelerated learning opportunities, active and cooperative learning experiences, advisory or similar types of guidance programs, tutorials, extended-year learning opportunities, intersessions, and summer school programs.<sup>5</sup>

## Previous

Recommendation 3 — Time

## Next

Time for All Courses

---

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>David Farbman and Claire Kaplan, *Time for a Change: The Promise of Extended-Time Schools for Promoting Student Achievement*, (PDF; Outside Source). Boston: Massachusetts 2020, 2005, 10.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs* (PDF; Outside Source), Washington, D.C.: The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, American Institute for Research, January 2005, 91.

<sup>5</sup>*Taking Center Stage*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2001, 150.

[Back to Top](#)



## Time for All Courses

As noted in Recommendation 2, "Instruction, Assessment, and Interventions"; and Recommendation 4, "Relevance," effective middle schools do not sacrifice challenging electives and interest-based activities for the sake of improving test scores. When faced with the challenge of making time for interventions, enrichment, and electives, many effective middle schools have developed flexible schedules that provide time for both reading **and** math interventions **and** exposure to the remainder of the courses of study outlined by *Education Code* Section 51220. The adopted courses of study for grades seven to twelve, inclusive, are:

- English
- Social sciences
- Foreign language or languages
- Physical education
- Science
- Mathematics
- Visual and performing arts
- Applied arts
- Vocational, technical, career education for employment preparation<sup>1</sup>

Effective middle schools do not reduce or eliminate time for social studies, science, and the arts. Instead, they conduct a thorough analysis of their time management. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (Outside Source) provides information related to resource allocation, including time, on its Web site.

### Previous

The Importance of Time in Middle Grades

### Next

Recommended and Required Instructional Minutes

---

### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>Middle Grades Frequently Asked Questions. Sacramento: California Department of Education (accessed April 18, 2007).



# Recommended and Required Instructional Minutes

Currently, in the state of California, there are 54,000 instructional minutes (DOC; 107KB; 9pp.) required per year for each grade from four through eight. Many school boards have adopted more than the minimum requirements to meet the needs of their adolescents.

California's *Education Code* (EC) outlines both the required and recommended instructional time for middle grades courses. Local stakeholders determine the number of minutes per course.

- The State of California has no hourly requirements for course work, other than for physical education. Students in grades one through six, inclusive, must be provided with physical education instruction for a total of not less than 200 minutes each ten school days, exclusive of recesses and the lunch period. (*EC* Section 51210[g]). Notwithstanding *EC* Section 51223, "All pupils, except pupils excused or exempted pursuant to *EC* Section 51241, shall be required to attend upon the courses of physical education for a total period of time of not less than 400 minutes each ten school days" (*EC* Section 51222[a]). Finally, if a school is identified as an elementary school in the County-District-School (CDS) code system, *EC* Section 51223 states that, "Notwithstanding the provisions of Sections 51210 and 51222, instruction in physical education in an elementary school maintaining any of grades one to eight shall be for a total period of time not less than 200 minutes each ten school days, exclusive of recesses and the lunch period.

In cases where a middle school operates on a block schedule, the State Board of Education has the option to consider granting a waiver for the required minutes for physical education (refer to the State Board Policy #99-03).

- The Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten through Grade Twelve (2007) (PDF; 6.06MB; 386pp.) page 13, recommends two hours of language arts instruction for grades four through eight. Students with special learning needs should receive this amount of time and more.

The Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten through Grade Twelve (2005) (PDF; 3.19MB; 411pp.), Chapter 1, page 9, recommends 50-60 minutes a day for all students, not including homework. It also provides guidelines for algebra. "By grade eight, students' mathematical sensitivity should be sharpened. Students need to start perceiving logical subtleties and appreciate the need for sound mathematical arguments before making conclusions. Students who are not prepared for Algebra I by grade nine should instead receive specialized instructional materials that focus on the prerequisite standards described in Appendix E. An algebra-readiness course will prepare students for success in algebra and subsequent advanced courses."<sup>1</sup> (For more about algebra readiness, refer to pages 262 and 264 of the Mathematics Framework.)

- The Science Framework (PDF; 3.84MB; 313pp.) does not recommend a specific number of instructional minutes. Beginning in 2006, eighth-grade science scores were included in the school's Academic Performance Index (API) baseline.
- The History/Social Science Framework (PDF; 2.91MB; 249pp.) does not recommend a specific number of instructional minutes. Eighth-grade students take the California Standards Test in history/social science. These scores affect the school's API.<sup>2</sup>
- The Visual and Performing Arts Framework (PDF; 2.8MB; 294 pp.) does not recommend a specific number of minutes for the instruction of dance, music, theatre, and/or visual arts.

## Previous

Time for All Courses

## Next

Time to Meet Student Needs

---

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools. Sacramento: California Department of Education, 2006, 78.

<sup>2</sup>Middle Grades Frequently Asked Questions. Sacramento: California Department of Education.

Back to Top



## Time to Meet Student Needs

Middle grades philosophy and the resulting middle grades reform movement list many of the developmental needs of adolescents (for more on the developmental characteristics of adolescents, refer to Recommendation 4—Relevance).

A compilation of recommendations and findings from *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* and *Turning Points 2000* states that among other things, middle school students need to:

- Be physically active.
- Have an adequate diet.
- See their physical changes as normal.
- Experience a wide variety of learning experiences.
- Learn how to accept self and others.
- Participate in interesting, challenging curriculum.
- Learn to use abstract thought.
- Practice using planning and organizing skills.
- Build positive relationships with peers and caring adults.
- Explore new types of experiences through enrichment or electives.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, struggling students also need intensive engagement and remediation in the middle grades—before the rigors of high school seem overwhelming. Since many researchers agree that repeating a grade is not an effective strategy for helping struggling students succeed, the middle grades present the last chance to provide students with critical skills and knowledge before dropping out appears to them as the only option. For information on statistics related to retention, please see the section on Retention Options.

Summer bridge programs offer an alternative to both social promotion and the alternative—dropping out. See the discussion about social promotion and summer bridge programs in Recommendation 6.

### Related Links

- Retention options, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.
- Transitions, Recommendation 6—Transitions, TCSII.

### Previous

Recommended and Required Instructional Minutes

### Next

Time for multiple opportunities to succeed

---

### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>Fundamentals for Student Success in the Middle Grades (Outside Source). Westerville, Ohio: National Middle School Association, n.d.

[Back to Top](#)



## Time for multiple opportunities to succeed

Differentiated instruction is one way that teachers help students learn according to their own abilities. Differentiated instruction includes learning activities requiring varied lengths of time for active and passive teaching strategies that match students' learning styles and academic needs.

Direct instruction typically requires less time than active learning, which includes creative writing, problem solving, experimenting, constructing, perfecting visual and performing arts skills, and other activities that link knowing and doing abilities.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Granger Junior High School, Sweetwater Union High School District, a 2009 Schools to Watch™—Taking Center Stage Model School**

The staff members at Granger Junior High School made a commitment to provide immediate analysis of quiz results so that students could continue to improve. Using a school wide data system, teachers are able to provide immediate feedback on weekly quiz results for all core classes. The readily-available data also allows teachers to differentiate and provide enrichment opportunities to students who understand the standard, or to re-teach those who have not yet mastered concepts. Students who do not pass a quiz are assigned tutors in the after-school program where they may also retake the quiz.

- Granger DataQuest School Profile
- Granger Junior High School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Granger Junior High School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
- Practices in the Spotlight

Struggling adolescent learners may need additional time and alternative strategies to understand difficult concepts. Effective teachers often deliver information to students through the senses:

- Hear it (teacher explains a lesson orally).
- See it (students follow along in their books).
- Say it (reteach to the team or partner).
- Draw it (write or draw an example).
- Move with it (get out of seats, act it out, dance to music, sing it).
- Repeat it (Students summarize what they learned either orally or in writing).

Other ways to give students multiple opportunities to succeed include tutoring, remedial courses, and after school academies.

Some schools designate a short period each day—often 20-30 minutes—for students to practice core skills in math and ELA. For example, some schools use this time for sustained silent reading and study skills. A review of the literature on the effects of incorporating sustained silent reading (SSR) in class indicated that native speakers of English and students of English as a second language grew in both reading comprehension and vocabulary development relative to the amount of time spent reading. Students also develop more positive attitudes toward reading after the SSR programs. Researchers indicated that the effects of SSR are more prominent when the students are allowed to select their own reading materials and when the SSR programs are run for six months or more.<sup>1</sup>

At the KIPP Academy in New York, students begin the day with a special "Thinking Skills" period. During this 20-minute period, students

work to solve a specific problem (usually a math problem) that requires them to think through and process numerous pieces of information. The purpose of these exercises is to improve student's analytical, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills.<sup>2</sup>

## Related Links

- Interventions—Recommendation 2, TCSII.

### Previous

Time to Meet Student Needs

### Next

Time for tutoring and mentoring

---

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ping-Ha Chow and Chi-Ting Chou, Evaluating Sustained Silent Reading in Reading Classes(Outside Source), The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VI, No. 11 (November 2000).

<sup>2</sup>David Farbman and Claire Kaplan, Time for a Change: The Promise of Extended-Time Schools for Promoting Student Achievement (PDF; Outside Source) . Boston: Massachusetts 2020, 2005, 11.

[Back to Top](#)



## Time for tutoring and mentoring

School schedules can include tutoring, peer tutoring, and mentoring opportunities during the school day, before, or after school.



### In the Spotlight

**John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage model school**

The ASAP (All Student Academic Prep) program provides students with guided study and tutoring time daily (except Tuesday) from 11:30 to 12:45 p.m.

**Richard Henry Dana Middle School, Wiseburn Elementary School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage model school**

Dana students receive mentoring during their lunch break. Local mathematicians, engineers, and scientists employed by various businesses within the attendance area meet with students. .

- [John Glenn DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [John Glenn Middle School of International Studies \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor Guide: John Glenn Middle School of International Studies \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
  
- [Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Richard Henry Dana Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor Guide: Richard Henry Dana Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

The related section in Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention discusses how before- or after-school tutoring or mentoring centers provide skilled teachers to help students learn skills and concepts they have not mastered, work on missed assignments, do homework, or analyze test problems they did not understand.

#### Previous

Time for multiple opportunities to succeed

#### Next

Time for accelerated academic interventions



## Time for accelerated academic interventions

Flexible middle grade schedules provide time for students to receive accelerated remediation or instruction in an intensive intervention program if they were not able to master a concept on pace with grade-level standards. Special populations such as English learners and special education students typically need additional time. EPC #8 calls for flexibility in lesson and course pacing schedule to allow sufficient interventions.

By definition, accelerated interventions mean that the students need to make up **more than one year** of learning in one academic year. The implications for scheduling are that students need extra periods each day if they are to accelerate learning **and** have time for electives and the courses needed for high school and college.



### In the Spotlight

#### **McKinleyville Middle School, McKinleyville Union School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School and CalSTAT Leadership site**

It has an exemplary special education inclusion program despite scheduling challenges. The school's master schedule clusters RSP (Resource Specialist Program) students so that RSP teachers and paraprofessionals can support them in regular classrooms. Because of this program and its success, the number of special education students have decreased significantly. The district has made a commitment to maintain RSP staffing.

- [McKinleyville DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [McKinleyville Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: McKinleyville Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
- [McKinleyville Middle School CalSTAT Leadership Site \(Outside Source\)](#)

#### **Previous**

[Time for tutoring and mentoring](#)

#### **Next**

[Time for before- and after-school programs](#)

[Back to Top](#)



## Time for before- and after-school programs

The “Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshots” summarize evaluations of after school programs “within each of four outcome domains: academics, family, prevention, and youth development.” The evaluations used rigorous methods to demonstrate that after-school programs can produce benefits for participants. However, the findings are inconclusive. For example, the family and prevention programs had little impact, while the academics and youth development programs showed a mixture of some positive results mixed with other less positive ones. In addition, the Gevirtz Homework Project (GHP), a 45-minute, after-school “homework club,” saw no effects on academic outcomes.<sup>1</sup> For more on before- and after-school programs, refer to the section in Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention.



### In the Spotlight

**Philip Magruder Middle School, Torrance Unified School District, is one of the 2009 California Distinguished Schools**

Magruder Middle School is featured on the California Department of Education's (CDE) Closing the Achievement Gap Web site for its “Signature” Practice, the Seize the Day Program. This exemplary practice addresses several of the CDE's 12 Recommendations for Middle Grades Success including time, transitions, and access.

The Seize the Day Program was developed in 2005 to combat disciplinary issues, low attendance rates, a lack of student involvement, and a significant achievement gap within its subgroups of students. The school wide program extends learning resources and opportunities beyond the limitations of a traditional bell schedule and school year by offering additional programs before school, after school, and during lunch time. The school is committed to make use of every minute that students are on campus. It is a comprehensive approach involving students, staff, community partners, and parents that focuses on students' social, emotional, and physical well-being.

A primary goal of the Seize the Day Program is to create a welcoming, comfortable, engaging, and effective learning environment beyond the traditional school day for all students. A network of on-campus clubs, activities, and facilities, and a series of student-led programs ease transition into and out of middle school and increase resources to help students attain academic goals.

As sixth grade students enter Magruder, they are invited to participate in “Operation Back to School” (OBS), a week long summer program offering social, academic, and emotional support as well as free school supplies to give them a head start on the school year. OBS commences before the school year starts and Magruder teachers come to campus during their own summer vacations to jump-start the acclimation process and teach students about rotating schedules (through a modified four-period schedule), time management, involvement opportunities, and new academic expectations.

The results of expanding the school experience beyond traditional time boundaries have been rewarding. Attendance rates and physical fitness levels at Magruder have increased. The suspension rate has dropped. Participation in extracurricular clubs and activities and attendance at parent nights has increased. Over the course of three years, faculty and students created more than 30 diverse clubs ranging from English-language development support and basketball to GEOBee and Garden Gurus. In 2008-09, more than 70 percent of students across all grade levels were involved in “Seize the Day” programs.

Philip Magruder Middle is one of the schools featured on the CDE's Closing the Achievement Gap Web site. The site contains helpful information, research, and success stories including “Signature” Practices from some of California's Distinguished Schools.

- [Philip Magruder Middle School DataQuest Profile](#)
- [Philip Magruder Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Signature Practice: Seize the Day \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)

- Closing the Achievement Gap's School Profile: Philip Magruder Middle School (Outside Source)
- Practices in the Spotlight Index

**Previous**

Time for accelerated academic interventions

**Next**

Time for counseling and mental health

---

**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup>Out-of-School Time Evaluation Snapshot: Learning from Small-Scale Experimental Evaluations of After School Programs (PDF; Outside Source), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Family Research Project, May 2006.

[Back to Top](#)



## Time for counseling and mental health

Typically, schools do not need to schedule counseling into the school day. However, in many schools, the counselor may provide elective courses, such as peer mediation and service-learning opportunities, that are part of the master schedule. Students who need specific behavioral or emotional health counseling make appointments to visit counselors either before, during, or after the school day. Advisory teachers and counselors work together to meet the intellectual as well as the socioemotional needs of students. If a class period is not routinely designated during the school day, schools that have advisory and study skills periods are able to release students for counseling when it does not interfere with any other classes.



### In the Spotlight

**Castaic Middle School, Castaic Union Elementary School District, a 2003 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Castaic Middle School's six-period schedule provides time each morning for a 17-minute advisory period for sustained silent reading.

**John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Counselors meet with sixth graders in their ATLAS (Approaches to Learning Academic Seminar) class, where monthly counselor workshops address important social and academic topics.

**Richard Henry Dana Middle School, Wiseburn Elementary School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Students take an elective on service-learning from the school counselor. They receive training in leadership and tutoring skills and then meet with elementary school students to help them with academic tutoring.

- [Castaic DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Castaic Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Castaic Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
  
- [John Glenn DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [John Glenn Middle School of International Studies \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: John Glenn Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
  
- [Richard Henry Dana DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Richard Henry Dana Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Richard Henry Dana Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

### Related Links

- Advisory programs (homeroom), Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- California Results-Based School Counseling and Student Support Guidelines (2007) (PDF; 613KB; 85pp.)
- Counseling, Recommendation 8—Safety, Resilience, and Health, TCSII.

**Previous**

Time for before- and after-school programs

**Next**

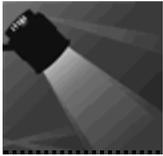
Time for electives



## Time for electives

Forward-thinking middle schools make a commitment to providing interest-based and career-related electives that will keep middle grades students engaged while letting them experience the joys of lifelong learning. One study on extended time listed the following schedule variations that allowed for electives (each example is from a different school):

- Four 60-minute elective periods per week (Choices include step aerobics class, chess, basketball, art, and chorus.)
- Two periods of physical education, two periods of art/music, and two periods of computers/research per week
- Eight to 15 hours of electives per semester (Choices include instrumental music, computer lab, yoga, dance, an engineering program called “Destination Imagination,” crochet, swimming, and French.)
- Two 50-minute physical education classes and two 50-minute computer classes per week
- Four 50-minute elective periods per week (Choices include art, drama, engineering design, computer web design, *tae kwon do*, world dance, knitting, instrumental music, soccer, basketball, softball, and field hockey.)
- Eight 50-minute periods of electives per semester (Students chose two of the following each semester: art, dance, theatre, Japanese, Chinese, or physical education.)
- One 45-minute physical education class and one 60-minute art class per day
- Approximately 4.25 hours of electives per week (Choices include hip-hop/Latin dance, drumming, woodworking, chess, theatre, introduction to photography, music technology, basketball, soccer, swimming, and golf.)<sup>1</sup>



### In the Spotlight

#### **Rancho Cucamonga Middle School, Cucamonga Elementary School District, a 2006 On the Right Track school**

Rancho Cucamonga Middle initiated a fifth period called the “Dangling Fifth.” Struggling students receive an additional class in math or English language arts (ELA). Students who are at grade level or above receive an elective. The success of the program means that fewer students need supplemental classes, and so the master schedule now includes more electives. In addition, to meet the needs of students who entered Rancho Cucamonga Middle School reading at the second- and third-grade level, the school professionals modified the master schedule to include the following:

- Multiple subject-credentialed staff members teach any one of the four core subject areas.
- If the students need both ELA and math—more than they can fit in the “Dangling Fifth”—they take a seventh period after school.
- A Title I coordinator does a pullout program with students who are far below grade level.

This program, along with other strategic school improvement efforts, helped the staff members to raise the school’s Academic Performance Index from 554 in 1999 to 727 in 2009.

- Rancho Cucamonga DataQuest School Profile
- Rancho Cucamonga Middle School (Outside Source)
- On the Right Track 6

## Related Links

- Electives and exploratory courses (interest-based), Recommendation 4—Relevance, TCSII.

**Previous**

Time for counseling and mental health

**Next**

Time for clubs and co-curricular experiences

---

**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup>David Farbman and Claire Kaplan, Time for a Change: The Promise of Extended-Time Schools for Promoting Student Achievement (PDF; Outside Source). Boston: Massachusetts 2020, 2005, 13.

[Back to Top](#)



## Time for clubs and co-curricular experiences

Like counseling, clubs generally do not require a daily or weekly spot in the master schedule unless faculty advisers have regular duties. Nonetheless, parents generally appreciate schools that recognize the importance of clubs and extra-curricular offerings for their middle grades students. Many middle schools provide lunchtime co-curricular activities such as intramural sports, spirit and academic competitions, student-sponsored games and entertainment, as well as clubs such as robotics, chess, and drill team.

Although schools may make clubs available outside the school day, such offerings exclude students who have no transportation for before- and after-school events.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Clark Intermediate School, Clovis Unified School District, a 2009 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage 2009 Model School**

Co-curricular involvement is literally a requirement at Clark. One Friday a month at Clark is dedicated to a Club Schedule (seminar and assembly/elective) where every student attends a club of his/her choice. In addition, the zero period PE option allows a student to take his/her PE class and marching band before school, freeing time for additional electives and support classes during the scheduled day. Through strategic scheduling, students are offered an opportunity to explore personal interests, topics important to their own lives and experiences, and career options.

Club choices at Clark include duck calling, modified cars, competitive athletics, award-winning bands, and choirs. Several teams are offered in football, volleyball, basketball, softball, and baseball. Instrumental music offers marching and symphonic bands and orchestra. Choir choices include both a boys and girls choir in addition to a sotto voce, concert, and chamber choir options. The drama department offers a musical and dramatic production each year and an advanced class for students with a special interest in drama. The Folklorico Dancers and the Hmong Dancers offer students a chance to represent and increase appreciation of their culture each year. In addition, the school supports an ongoing Multicultural Club which is open to all students and represents all of the diverse cultures on campus.

- Clark Intermediate DataQuest School Profile
- Clark Intermediate School (PDF; Outside Source)
- School to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Clark Intermediate School (PDF; Outside Source)
- School to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
- Clark Bell Schedule (Outside Source)



### In the Spotlight

**Reyburn Intermediate School, Clovis Unified School District**

Ensures that clubs and enrichment classes are available to all students. Reyburn staff members designed a once-a-month enrichment afternoon schedule. On that day, all students and all faculty members sign up for and participate in one of many clubs and elective courses.

- [Reyburn DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Reyburn Intermediate School \(Outside Source\)](#)

## Related Links

- [Relationship building through student clubs and connections, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.](#)

### Previous

[Time for electives](#)

### Next

[Time for celebrations](#)



## Time for celebrations

Lunch hour is also an opportune time to fit in bonding experiences and celebrations that build relationships between faculty and students and within student groups. Likewise, special assemblies that fit in alternative-day schedules offer time during the school day when the entire school community can celebrate:

- Improving attendance
- Achieving 95 percent participation during CST testing
- Making API
- Meeting a goal for number of books read or number of service hours performed
- Honoring teams that have received recognition
- Recognizing acts of kindness to others



### In the Spotlight

**John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage model school**

The school community holds what it calls “Renaissance Academic Rallies” to reinforce and recognize the school’s academic culture. The rallies help to transmit a culture of learning, where each year one-third of the population is new. The rallies have proven to be a way to create a “buy-in” to the school culture.

- John Glenn DataQuest School Profile
- John Glenn Middle School of International Studies (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor’s Guide: John Glenn Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

## Related Links

- Building community through celebrations, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.

### Previous

Time for clubs and co-curricular experiences

### Next

Transportation issues



## Transportation issues

Each school and community has unique transportation systems and needs. Bus transportation schedules must be considered in middle grades programs that take place before or after school so that all students have access to the enrichment offerings. Access to exploratory and enrichment offerings should not be available only to the wealthy or those who excel academically. Low-income students often lack transportation options. As a result, effective middle grades programs will address transportation issues for before- and after-school programs. Districts can also take a role in structuring bus schedules to meet the needs of students.

### **Previous**

Time for celebrations

### **Next**

Time for Professional Learning Community Activities



## Time for Professional Learning Community Activities

Students are not the only ones who need more time. Teachers do as well. It is critical that teachers have scheduled time to work together to analyze the standards, map the curriculum, articulate with other teachers in subjects and grades, plan cross-curricular connections (such as writing), and analyze student data to improve instruction.

According to the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform's Schools to Watch™ criteria and California's Nine Essential Program Components (EPC #7), teachers need time to plan, evaluate, and collaborate if they are to be effective. They use student results to inform immediate next steps and instructional practice. ". . . Interdisciplinary teaming seems to have the most positive effect when teachers meet often throughout the school year, when they openly discuss their goals and when they plan curricula for a relatively small group of students (i.e., fewer than ninety). Common planning time, in particular, appears to be a key factor."<sup>1</sup> To underscore this point further, EPC #7 calls for ongoing teacher collaboration by grade level and vertical collaboration by subject. Scheduling time is critical for teachers to analyze

While the benefits of teacher collaboration within a professional learning community (PLCs) may not be in dispute, finding time for collaboration may be a challenge. Some schools have adapted the master schedule around a longer school day for students four days of the week. The fifth day is shortened to allow teachers a solid two- to three-hour block of time to work together in professional development and curriculum-planning sessions.<sup>2</sup>



### In the Spotlight

#### **Bernice Ayer Middle School, Capistrano Unified School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Professional learning communities have helped Bernice Ayer staff members to raise API scores. The staff's close working relationship started with staff retreats, school-based staff development, and frequent social activities. In fall 2004, staff members extended the school day slightly and scheduled one hour for collaborative planning on a weekly "late start" day. To govern their use of the additional planning time — called Articulation and Collaboration for Excellence (ACE)—the staff committed to team norms that have allowed them to stay focused and positive.

During ACE time, teachers collaborate by departments, common planning teams, and grade-level teams. Each type of collaborative meeting has a different purpose. For example, the leadership team agreed to study student suspensions broken down by ethnicity so they could better understand trends. Subject-matter teams aligned curriculum to state standards. Teams share best practices and work with district resource teachers to improve instruction. Common planning teams have focused on analyzing test data, defining course outcomes, developing assessments and rubrics, examining student work, and mapping the curriculum to the instructional calendar. The grade-level teams focus on interdisciplinary planning, scheduling of major projects and tests so they do not conflict, and monitoring the progress of individual students.

Monthly meetings of school leaders from seven elementary schools, three middle schools, and San Clemente High School help the school provide for vertical articulation and planning.

Students quickly receive the interventions and support they need through grade-level teaming. Communication with parents has also improved through grade-level team planning. The California Department of Education recognized Bernice Ayer as a Distinguished School in 2001 and as one of California's Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage in 2005.

#### **John Glenn Middle School of International Studies, Desert Sands Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

During the district's professional development "August Buy-Back Days," the school staff works on developing school wide rubrics and integrated lessons. For example, in 2005 the seventh-grade teachers created integrated language arts and science lessons.

At John Glenn, collaboration takes place every Tuesday from 12:30 p.m. to 2:25 p.m. A prep period and an instructional collaboration period are included in the schedule each day.

- Bernice Ayer DataQuest School Profile
- Bernice Ayer Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Bernice Ayer Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
  
- John Glenn DataQuest School Profile
- John Glenn Middle School of International Studies (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: John Glenn Middle School of International Studies (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

## Related Links

- 2009 Distinguished Middle and High Schools, California Department of Education.
- Coalition of Essential Schools: Transforming Public Education
- Finding Time for Collaboration and Using it Well, Inclusive Schools Network.
- Master schedules, Recommendation 3—Time, TCSII.
- Teacher Development, Edutopia.
- What is a Professional Learning Community? Recommendation 10—Professional Learning, TCSII.

### Previous

Transportation issues

### Next

Data review to improve instruction

---

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Academic Achievement in the Middle Grades: What Does the Research Tell Us? (PDF; Outside Source) Atlanta, GA.: Southern Regional Education Board, 2003, 9.

<sup>2</sup>David Farbman and Claire Kaplan, Time for a Change: The Promise of Extended-Time Schools for Promoting Student Achievement (PDF; Outside Source). Boston: Massachusetts 2020, 2005, 12.

Back to Top



## Data review to improve instruction

One of the most critical roles teams play is in evaluating data from common assessments and statewide tests to determine needed instructional modifications and interventions.

### Related Links

- [Assessment, Recommendation 2—Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention, TCSII.](#)

#### Previous

[Time for Professional Learning Community Activities](#)

#### Next

[Teacher preparation](#)



## Teacher preparation

A discussion of teacher planning time needs to distinguish between teacher preparation time (called prep) and common planning time. Closing the achievement gap requires that teachers participate in regularly scheduled meetings to collaborate on lesson planning, data review, and interventions. However, individual teachers also need time to prepare lessons, grade assignments and tests, and meet with students. Prep time is more valuable when all members of a department or team (for example, all seventh-grade English teachers or all teachers in one small learning community) share a common prep time so that they can do additional collaboration, coaching, planning, and mentoring as needed.'

Many progressive middle schools schedule common teacher prep time for teams every day or alternate days so that team members can plan together, grade common assessments, and prepare for lessons on the pacing guide. These common planning times are also valuable for lesson studies.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Granite Oaks Middle School, Rocklin Unified School District, a California Middle Grades Partnership Network School**

The Granite Oaks faculty designed the school's structure and bell system to accommodate learning. The school operates on a seven-period day. Faculty members teach for four periods in their area of subject-matter expertise. Teachers work in teams that structure the five teaching periods as they need. Each team has two periods without students because students go to physical education and an elective. As a result, each teacher has one (common) prep period and one advisory. Team prep periods "float" so instructional aides can meet with students in each team. Students who need intensive interventions use their elective class or attend before- and after-school classes. Resource teachers use the extra period to give extra help for their mainstreamed special education students. .

Since teaming is central to the success of Granite Oaks Middle School, there is a short schedule every Monday for teaming in addition to daily common prep periods for each team. Faculty members also meet before school and during release time, when needed, for special planning. This scheduled commitment to teaming allows grade-level teachers to have common prep periods; interdisciplinary teams to meet by grade level; departmental, cross-grade teams to meet to articulate course work; and all teams to plan for and work towards student achievement.

- [Granite Oaks DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Granite Oaks Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [California Middle Grades Partnership Network School](#)

## Related Links

- [What is a Professional Learning Community?, Recommendation 10—Professional Learning, TCSII.](#)

### Previous

[Data review to improve instruction](#)

### Next





## Special projects

Sometimes a special project requires teams to donate a portion of their common planning or prep time. One common project is the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). The single plan consolidates all school plans for programs funded through the School and Library Improvement Block Grant, the Pupil Retention Block Grant, the Consolidated Application, and NCLB Program Improvement into the Single Plan for Student Achievement. Teachers can participate on the team during district in-service days or during regularly scheduled staff meetings.

Contracts usually dictate whether teachers can spend additional time after school to work on special projects, such as WASC accreditation, Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage self studies, or Distinguished Schools applications, to name a few.

### **Previous**

Teacher preparation

### **Next**

Building community through celebrations



## Building community through celebrations

Just as celebrations are important for helping students bond to the school culture, team members need to spend time with one another to help build team spirit. In addition to picnics, barbecues, and games during back-to-school pre-service days, teams also benefit from other bonding experiences such as seasonal parties, bowling events, Friday dinners, and attending conferences together.

### Related Links

- Academic celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Celebrations—a culture based on caring and success, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Character celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Effort/motivation celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- Promotions, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.
- School spirit celebrations, Recommendation 5—Relationships, TCSII.

### Previous

[Special projects](#)

### Next

[Implications of School Schedules for Teacher Contracts](#)



## Implications of School Schedules for Teacher Contracts

When schools provide extra class periods or lengthen the school day, it does not necessarily mean that teachers are delivering instruction to students all of those periods. It does mean that a flexible schedule may require some teachers to start early and others to start late. Flexibility is critical in effective middle grades master schedules. Frequent discussions with union representatives will help them to appreciate the importance of flexible schedules that provide time needed to prepare young adolescents for high school and beyond.

### **Previous**

Building community through celebrations

### **Next**

Master schedules



## Master schedules

Although block scheduling is frequently equated with flexible scheduling, there are many different options within the concept of flexible scheduling. The main advantage of flexible scheduling is that it allows teachers to give students more options for moving to and from interventions, electives, and enrichment opportunities as needed. The flexible schedules also allow students more time for learning,<sup>1</sup> as well as regular time for PLCs to plan lessons and common assessments, to analyze data, and to plan learning activities that will engage all students.

The original *Taking Center Stage* likened master scheduling to designing a mosaic. The pieces include grade-level teams, intervention classes, room for students to move when they master an intervention, electives, clubs, assemblies, and teacher team meetings. Pages 150 to 152 of *Taking Center Stage* included the following suggestions about creating a master schedule:

- Allocate time differentially to allow for setup and take down of equipment for instructional purposes (science laboratories, exploratory programs, school-to-career, shops, instrumental and vocal music classes, visual arts programs, physical education, and computer laboratories).
- Provide teachers with a planning period consistent with contract provisions.
- Assign adjunct teachers such as resource teachers, physical education teachers, and part-time elective specialists to a team to encourage professional collaboration and cross-curricular connections.
- Allow time for advisory programs or guidance activities.
- Provide opportunities for school-based and community-based service-learning experiences, students' access to health care providers, human services agencies, and other health support services.
- Reduce passing time between classes.
- Replace passing bells with chimes with soft music.
- Consider later start times to give students an extra hour or so of sleep. Reduce roll-taking, announcements, and similarly disruptive activities.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Sam Brannan Middle School, Sacramento City Unified School District**

In 2004, staff members changed to a “3-2-1 (red, yellow, green)” color-coded schedule that placed all intensive intervention classes into the same block period. This schedule allows teachers and administrators to move students into grade-level courses when they mastered the concepts. In six months (including intersession and summer school), API scores went from 705 to 750.

Teachers can blend green and yellow intervention levels into one period if students are no more than one year apart in ability. Collaboration keeps all the seventh-grade teachers on the same pacing guide. They focus on the same standard so that if 10 percent of their students need interventions, all of those students meet with two of the teachers (20 each) and keep on the pace but with intensive focus so students can move back to the regular class when they reach proficiency. Teachers at Brannan learned that if they make science and social studies one semester each, a student who “graduates” up to grade level has a viable course to choose mid-semester.

- Sam Brannan DataQuest School Profile
- Sam Brannan Middle School (Outside Source)

**Previous**

Implications of School Schedules for Teacher Contracts

**Next**

Six-period days

---

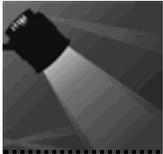
**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup>Getting Smarter, Becoming Fairer—A Progressive Education Agenda for a Stronger Nation (PDF; Outside Source). Prepared by Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future; A National Task Force on Public Education; A Joint Initiative of the Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future. Washington, D.C., August 2005, 15-28.



## Six-period days

Traditional junior high school schedules typically offer six classes per day, allowing students to take a standard mix of classes—usually math, English, social studies, science, physical education, and an elective.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Alvarado Intermediate School, Rowland Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Alvarado has a rotating six-period schedule. Each day starts and ends with a different class. For instance, Monday starts with “A” period and ends with “F”; Tuesday starts with “B” period and ends with “A.” This allows every student the chance to be at his or her best in every class at least one day a week.

Each student takes the following classes:

- English/language arts
- Mathematics
- History
- Science
- Physical education
- Exploratory or elective class

The day begins at 7:48 a.m. and concludes at 2:28 p.m., with the exception of a late start on Tuesday to allow time for staff meetings. After school, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30p.m., there are a variety of activities, including tutoring, clubs, sports, music programs, and other activities.

- Alvarado DataQuest School Profile
- Alvarado Intermediate School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor’s Guide: Alvarado Intermediate School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage

#### **Culver City Middle School, Culver City Unified School District, a 2003 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Students have a daily sustained silent reading time during Culver City’s six-period day.

- Culver City DataQuest School Profile
- Culver City Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor’s Guide: Culver City Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
- Culver City’s bell schedule (Outside Source)

#### **Rancho Milpitas Middle School, Milpitas Unified School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage model school and a 2005 California Distinguished School**

Students attend six periods per day. School begins each day at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. School ends for students at 1:25 p.m. on Wednesdays to allow teacher to have planning time.

Rancho Milpitas DataQuest School Profile

- [Rancho Milpitas Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Rancho Milpitas Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
- [Rancho Milpitas Middle School bell schedule \(Outside Source\)](#)

**Previous**

[Master schedules](#)

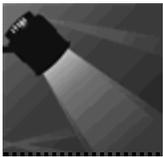
**Next**

[Seven- or eight-period days](#)



## Seven- or eight-period days

To provide more time in English language arts and additional intervention classes, many schools have moved to a seven- or eight-period day. In some schools, a seven-period day routinely provides a double block for English language arts for all students every day. In other schools the seven-period day provides two flexible periods that can be used for electives, science and math labs, and interventions for specific students. Schools that maintain a six-period structure may offer the extra two classes before and after school. "Zero period" is usually before school, and an "eighth"-period elective is after school.



### In the Spotlight

#### **McKinleyville Middle School, McKinleyville Union Elementary School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

McKinleyville's eight-period day shortens every Monday to allow for teacher teaming. At each grade level, students have a core class in which they spend three periods daily studying reading, language arts, and social studies with the same teacher. The core class allows teachers and students to develop a personal relationship and connect with one other. The rest of a student's day involves moving to departmentalized classes. Students have one period each of math, science, physical education, and an elective. Seventh- and eighth-grade electives include band, art, drama, yearbook/print media, technology, student teaching assistant, and academic support. Sixth-grade students enroll in a "selective," titled "Building Skills for Success." The academic support class is an elective/selective option for students needing additional support.

- [McKinleyville DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [McKinleyville Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: McKinleyville Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#),
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)

#### **Previous**

[Six-period days](#)

#### **Next**

[Block schedules](#)



## Block schedules

Block scheduling combined with interdisciplinary team teaching has become a common way of meeting the many requirements of middle grades education. Block schedules help overcome many of the constraints imposed by conventional six-, seven-, or eight-period days by having classes that are longer than the typical 50-minute class period. Students take as many courses as before (sometimes more), but the courses are not offered the entire school year.

Although many variations of block scheduling exist, the simplest involves breaking the school day into fewer but longer segments, each segment equivalent to three or four conventional periods. Teams of teachers responsible for two or more subjects then corroboratively apportion time within the block according to the nature of the specific instructional goals.

Teachers who use block scheduling usually cite several advantages:

- It gives teachers the ability to get to know the students better.
- It provides time to get the students involved in projects.
- It allows time to offer electives and support classes.
- It allows PLC teachers to have common preparation periods in their schedules.
- It allows more time to explore in-depth academic content through project-based and traditional learning.

However, research does not prove the effects of block scheduling on student achievement. In *Block Scheduling Revisited*, the author noted that there has been a great deal of research on block scheduling and that it neither helps nor harms student achievement. It is, however, harmful when used for extended lectures, but teachers can learn to make effective use of it. In addition, it does give time for more in-depth work on each topic. The authors of the study concluded, "Appropriate changes in instructional practices and the effective use of class time have been found to be essential to the success of block scheduling." The study also emphasizes that the shift to block scheduling requires a great deal of staff development, especially in the writing of pacing guides.<sup>1</sup>

Data from two studies showed that block scheduling had a larger positive impact on low-achieving students than traditional scheduling did.<sup>2</sup>

In another study, the authors studied the characteristics of grouping and scheduling practices that seem to have been helpful for low-income Latino students. Core teacher teams, where each team shared a planning period and had the same students for science, math, language arts, and social studies, existed at almost all of the schools. In addition, five of the nine schools had a form of block scheduling.<sup>3</sup>

Several key concerns about block scheduling center on unintended effects, including the following:

- Adolescent learners are generally unable to sustain focus for 90 minutes. Effective teaching during a 90-minute block requires that teachers rethink lesson delivery to incorporate movement, activities, and student-centered instruction. Teachers do not simply extend their lesson or try to deliver two 50-minute lectures in a 90-minute period.
- Block scheduling may result in reduced total course time. As a result, teachers may not be able to cover all the material, especially higher-level material.
- Attendance problems are another concern. Missing one day of school in a block schedule format is equivalent to missing two or more days in a traditional schedule format.<sup>4</sup>
- An every-other-day structure does not work for all students. Some schools have developed a modified block schedule to overcome or minimize this challenge with a daily bridge or study skills class.

### Previous

Seven- or eight-period days

### Next

Four by four block

---

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>J. Allen Queen, "Block Scheduling Revisited," *Kappan* Online, Vol. 82, No. 3 (2000), 214-222.

<sup>2</sup>C. W. Lewis et al., "The Effects of Full and Alternative Day Block Scheduling on Language Arts and Science Achievement in a Junior High School," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11 (2003).

<sup>3</sup>Dan Jesse, Alan Davis, and Nancy Pokorny, "High Achieving Middle Schools for Latino Students in Poverty," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, Vol. 9 (2004), 33, 34.

<sup>4</sup>Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs (PDF; Outside Source). Washington, D.C.: The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center, American Institutes for Research, January 2005, 10.

[Back to Top](#)



## Four by four block

The 4 × 4 (four by four) block schedule has four 90-minute classes a day. Students change courses every 45 days (four times a school year). Students and teachers have fewer classes to prepare for and experience fewer interruptions in the school day. Longer blocks of time make it possible for teachers to conduct complex learning activities such as science experiments.

### **Previous**

Block schedules

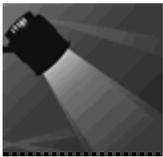
### **Next**

Rotating block



## Rotating block

Another variation on block scheduling is becoming more popular. Known as the rotating block, the schedule shifts each day so that students get extended blocks of time for two subjects two days per week and a different two subjects on the alternate days. The fifth day often reverts to a more traditional six-period day and includes teacher teaming or special student assemblies. The rotating block is also known as the alternate day block (AB). In the alternate day block, students and teachers meet in three or four 90- to 120-minute classes on alternate days for the entire school year.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Bernice Ayer Middle School , Capistrano Unified School District, a 2005 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Bernice Ayer Middle School operates a modified block schedule. Class periods rotate on block days so that all classes fall during prime instructional hours for a portion of the week. Longer blocks of time provide extended learning opportunities for students to engage in projects, such as simulations and science labs that allow students to apply state standards to hands-on learning experiences.

The staff members implemented an educational support period (ESP) on the six-period days to help students organize themselves for homework, study for tests, and begin their homework for the evening. Resource teachers, instructional aides, and parent volunteers provide additional support to students during ESP.

Approximately 125 students attend zero period to add a second elective to their schedule of classes. On Tuesdays, school begins one hour later to provide time for teacher collaboration, known as ACE. During ACE time, students have the option of coming to school later or attending a variety of classes and activities provided through partnerships with the City of San Clemente and Capistrano Unified School District's community education department. Link to Bernice from the school's Web site.

#### **Reyburn Intermediate School, Clovis Unified School District**

The Reyburn Intermediate School's rotating block schedule allows extra time for special classes such as the agriculture class.

- [Bernice Ayer Middle School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Bernice Ayer Middle School \(PDF; Outside Source\)](#)
- [Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage](#)
- [Bernice Ayer's schedule \(Outside Source\)](#)
  
- [Reyburn DataQuest School Profile](#)
- [Reyburn Intermediate School \(Outside Source\)](#)
- [Reyburn's schedule \(Outside Source\)](#)

#### **Previous**

[Four by four block](#)

#### **Next**

[Other schedule variations](#)





## Other schedule variations

Although there are many schedule variations, some are noteworthy.



### In the Spotlight

#### **Culver City Middle School, Culver City Unified School District, a 2003 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

The school follows a regular six-period day on Mondays followed by three, two-hour block periods Tuesday through Friday. A copy of the school schedule is available on the school's Web site.

#### **Gaspar De Portola Middle School, San Diego Unified School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

To provide students with interventions, clubs, and bonding opportunities, De Portola runs a Six-to-Six (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.) supervised before- and after-school program. A copy of the De Portola's schedule is available on the school's Web site.

#### **Hollister School District**

To provide teacher teams with planning time, middle schools in Hollister have a Late Start day once a week. Every Wednesday, classes start an hour later at 9:19 a.m. The new schedule allows teachers 90 minutes to work together during paid time. It required a change in bus schedules and reduced each class period by five minutes.

#### **Medea Creek Middle School, San Diego Unified School District, a 2004 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

Medea Creek was on a block schedule for many years. After much discussion, staff members decided that some students and classes could benefit more by daily contact. Now, physical education and electives are on a 50 minute daily schedule. Seventh- and eighth-grade math and science are on an alternate-day block of 105 minutes. Sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade humanities (English and social studies) and sixth-grade math/science are scheduled for core classes of 105 minutes every day to allow teachers to either teach both subjects every day or flex and focus on one subject for the entire 105 minutes. Link to Medea Creek's schedule from the school's Web site.

#### **Toby Johnson Middle School, Elk Grove Unified School District, a 2006 Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage Model School**

This school has established an unusual 4x4 rotating block schedule that enhances the team structure and looping. Students at Toby Johnson have four 90-minute periods per day for nine weeks, which covers one semester. At the end of the nine-week semester, students transition to the first semester of the next four courses. In this way, first and second semester courses alternate every nine weeks. At the end of the year, the students have had eight classes instead of the six, which is traditional at most schools. The schedule allows students to engage in a diverse elective program that includes 21 classes. For example, the schedule allows students to take a class and a half in language arts and a class and a half in mathematics whether they are part of an honors program or they need remedial help.

In the first semester of a sample schedule, the students would take a 90-minute math block in first period. In second period, they might take a 90-minute science block. In third period, they would be with their humanities teacher, who is the only teacher they see every day all year long. Their fourth class is an elective.

In the next nine-week term, the students would stay with their humanities teacher, trade math for "Bridge"—the course that provides them additional instruction to cover some of the standards. The "Bridge" class gives students 45 minutes of mathematics instruction and 45 minutes of reading instruction. In that time, humanities teachers focus on literature tied more directly to history. The "Bridge" teachers cover enough of the standards from math and language arts so those teachers can

emphasize the power standards.

Toby Johnson's bell schedule is on its Web site.

- Culver City DataQuest School Profile
- Culver City Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Culver City Middle School (PDF: Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
- Culver City Middle School's Schedule (Outside Source)
  
- Gaspar De Portola DataQuest School Profile
- Gaspar De Portola Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Gaspar De Portola Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
- De Portola Middle School's Schedule (Outside Source)
  
- Hollister DataQuest District Profile
- Hollister School District (Outside Source)
  
- Medea Creek DataQuest School Profile
- Medea Creek Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Medea Creek Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
  
- Toby Johnson DataQuest School Profile
- Toby Johnson Middle School (Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage—Model School-Visitor's Guide: Toby Johnson Middle School (PDF; Outside Source)
- Schools to Watch™-Taking Center Stage
- Looping

## Related Links

- 2009 Distinguished Middle and High Schools, California Department of Education.

### Previous

Rotating block

### Next

Conclusion



## Conclusion

Effective middle schools use flexible schedules and extensive team planning time to deliver standards-based education that meets the developmental needs of all the diverse students in the school. The need for time—to deliver standards-based lessons and interventions, create relationships and celebrate successes, and improve learning based on assessment results—deserves careful consideration. Wise management of time will help middle grades students to be prepared to face the challenges of high school and beyond.

### **Previous**

Other schedule variations