

Professional Development Activity on Master Scheduling

It can be easy to replicate the master schedule from year to year and make adjustments based primarily on the number of students in each grade to drive the number of core courses. Although this may sound attractive and save time, adult needs—not student needs—may unintentionally drive it. This activity will help the school counselor–administrator team foster an intentional approach to developing a master schedule that is grounded in the school’s mission and vision statements. Guiding questions will help the team prioritize competing demands, and a power analysis will determine which priorities align with the school’s mission and vision. Prioritizing the considerations is not easy because the variables rarely complement each other; rather, they compete. Often, a prioritized schedule more reflects a best-fit scenario as opposed to an ideal outcome.

Time Frame

The team should allow three to six hours for this activity. The team should meet three times for one or two hours at a time.

Materials

This activity requires a piece of paper; a pen or pencil; and a copy of the school’s vision, mission, core value or belief statements, and foundational statements (if available) for every participant.

Process

The team should consider the following four steps regarding its school’s master schedule. Not all questions may pertain given the local context and developmental level. This is not an all-inclusive list, but it should encourage a more systematic conversation about the master schedule.

1. On a piece of paper, each team member answers the following questions as appropriate.
 - What facility limitations impact class sizes?
 - Do the district busing and school hours of operation impact the schedule?
 - What traveling or part-time faculty must we consider?
 - Do any faculty have release time or preparation period needs for cocurricular, extracurricular, or supervisory assignments that we must consider?
 - What special courses require additional time for preparing and for putting items away (such as band, art, or a cooking course)?
 - Do we have select courses such as labs or college credit, dual credit, or advanced placement courses requiring strategic placement to accommodate teachers and students?
 - Are there any part-time student needs that might impact the schedule?
 - Do we restrict lunchtimes by space or serving capacity, limiting schedule options?
 - Do district needs or collectively bargained agreements limit school day start and stop times?

- Do teachers' content areas require unique scheduling needs (such as one teacher to teach calculus, trigonometry, and discrete mathematical functions, so no two may be offered at the same time)?
 - Do schoolwide commitments such as clubs, homerooms, pull-out programs, or remediation or reteaching times impact the schedule?
 - Are there long-standing traditions or practices in which change is resisted?
 - Are there other forces, internal or external to the school, that impact the schedule?
2. Team members share and discuss their answers. More than likely, they will have different answers. Discussing these differences and the rationale for each decision can provide more information for prioritization.
 3. After reminding themselves of the school's foundational statements, which drive all school decisions, order the team's responses in terms of priority from *greatest* (1) to *least* (13).
 4. Compare the prioritized master scheduling responses to the following question and possible responses: What is this priority's power to achieve the school's mission? Is it very poor, poor, fair, good, or very good? Here, *power* is defined by ability. The answer is, of course, influenced by the reality that the school is part of a larger district and that district needs and priorities may take precedence over building-level priorities. The team's answer to this question affirms your priorities or results in necessary reprioritization.

Results

Participation in this activity will prepare the team to have an informed conversation about the master scheduling process and develop a plan to build the master schedule. The plan should include a time frame to begin the process and specific tasks for team members. Given the importance of the master schedule in day-to-day operations, we encourage team members to begin this activity early in the year so they have a clear plan when it is time to develop the master schedule for the following year.