

The Master Schedule: A Culture Indicator

NASSP: National Association of Secondary School Principals

https://www.nassp.org/tabid/3788/default.aspx?topic=The_Master_Schedule_A_Culture_Indicator

The master schedule is to a school what grading policies are to teachers and classrooms. It reveals the true beliefs, attitudes, values, and priorities of the school. The school's master schedule is like looking at an MRI of the inner workings of a school. It is the window to the soul of the school.

How the master schedule is constructed may be as important as what the master schedule contains. While the master schedule reveals what is really important to the school, how the master schedule is constructed reveals how professionals interact and how key decisions are made in the school. Finally, the master schedule discloses the true beliefs and attitudes the staff holds about the value of input from other staff members.

By this time, most schools have figured out what they want students to know and be able to do... In addition, most schools are either developing or have developed common formative assessments that help them to decide if students are learning. However, the real test for the school comes when students are not learning. How does the school respond to students who are not succeeding or who need extra help? It is how the school responds to this question that determines whether it is focused on the wants of the adults who work there or on the needs of the students who learn there.

In adult-focused schools, the master schedule reflects the wants of the staff. There are few or no interventions. All students are expected to complete courses in the same time frames. There are no double-block classes or flexible time frames for students to complete courses. The best, most experienced teachers are teaching the top students, and the best students are in the smallest classes.

In student- or learning-focused schools, the master schedule reflects the needs of the students. There are multiple, tiered interventions. Accommodations are built into the schedule for students who need math every day or who need three semesters to complete a specific science course. The best, most experienced teachers are teaching the neediest students. Teachers of higher-level courses also teach standard-level courses. Finally, the neediest students are in the smallest classes.

If the school is collaborative, the staff has a major role in decisions leading into drafting the master schedule. Teachers are most concerned with "what" they teach, next with "where" they teach, and lastly with "when" they teach. Therefore, instructional teams should have a say-so in who teaches what subjects. The "where" (classroom) can be decided collaboratively across teams or departments. Finally, the "when," which involves putting the puzzle together, is a team effort between the administrators, counselors, instructional leaders, and teachers or team leaders. Changes in any one of the inputs are only made with the consent of all involved parties.

The master schedule is a compilation of all individual student schedules. In schools that are adult-focused, students are batch scheduled. All the individual requests are entered into the computer and every student has the same chance as every other student to obtain their desired courses. Batch scheduling creates winners and losers.

In student- or learning-focused schools, individual schedules are constructed collaboratively. Math, science, world language, and social studies teachers meet with their colleagues in their respective disciplines and make course recommendations that are compiled and shared with counselors. The teachers of special needs students including special education and English language learners act in an advisory capacity and work in concert with the counselor to hand-schedule these students.

The Essential Question

Is your school adult-focused or is your school student- and learning-focused? Your master schedule and how it is constructed says more about your school than just about anything else. Behavior doesn't lie!

Discussion Questions:

Which recommendations from this article do you agree with?

Which recommendations do you disagree with?

How do these strategies align with your school's programming process?

Programming Prioritization Activity

Directions: Categorize the programming strategies below as “most critical,” “important but not critical,” and “least critical” to ensuring that your school’s students are college and career ready.

Most Critical (5)

Important But Not Critical (6)

Least Critical (5)

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Student Course Sequences:

1. Students have the opportunity to complete courses of advanced math and science by the end of high school.
2. Students have the opportunity to complete advanced course work in arts, Career and Technical sequences, or foreign language.
3. Students have the opportunity to complete at least one college level or college-prep level course while still in high school.

Student Supports and Experiences:

4. Students have access to structured experiences to communicate and collaborate in appropriate ways with a wide variety of people, including peers, teachers/professors, administrators, etc.
5. Students have access to structured experiences to be self-reflective on their learning, their behavior, and their strategies to solve problems.
6. Students have the opportunity to meet the qualifications to enter college without needing to take remedial courses in reading, writing, or math, including support to improve their scores on the math and ELA Regents exams as needed.
7. Students have access to an advisory experience to make best-fit decisions for postsecondary choices and be supported through the application/articulation process.
8. Students have significant extracurricular, internship, and employment experiences.

Teacher/Staff Planning Time:

9. Teachers have common planning time to develop instructional strategies for teaching organizational skills and work habits that will enable students to independently structure their work in college and on the jobs.
10. Teachers have the opportunity for professional development experiences during the school day (i.e., support from mentor teachers, professional development during early-release days).
11. Math teachers have common planning time to develop instructional strategies to ensure student mastery of Common Core aligned mathematics skills.
12. Grade level teacher teams have common planning time to monitor student progress and develop instructional strategies around mastery of Common Core aligned skills in literacy and reading informational texts.
13. Grade level teacher teams have common planning time to develop instructional strategies to support mastery of Common Core aligned research and writing skills through instruction across content areas.
14. Teachers and administrators have the opportunity to convene an inquiry team to determine school preferences, course taking patterns, and extra-curricular activities based on informed career pathway aspirations.

Teacher Workload:

15. Teachers have the smallest student caseload possible in order to best personalize student learning experiences and support student achievement (low student-to-teacher ratio).
16. Teachers instruct as few distinct courses as possible in order to maximize time available to improve instructional practice within the content area.

Additional Strategies Not Listed Here:

17. _____
18. _____

Four-Year Program Plan

This high school has 400 students, with approximately 100 students per grade (9 – 12).

GRADE	ELA		Social Studies		Math		Science		LOTE		ADVISORY
					Math 8	Int Algebra (June Regents)	Science 8	Living Env. (June Regents)	Some LOTE, but no HS credit	Passed the SLP exam (2 HS credits)	
9	ELA 9 (with 15- student remedial section)	ELA 9 Honors (students take Regents at end of grade 10)	Global I		Int Algebra (June Regents) (Double period for students with math deficiency)	Geometry (June Regents) (Double period for students with math deficiency)	Living Env. (June Regents) (Double period for students with science deficiency)	Earth Science (June Regents)	Spanish I	Spanish II	Focus on school culture, expectations, personal and community goals, and responsibilities
10	ELA 10	ELA 10 Honors (June Regents)	Global II (June Regents)		Geometry (June Regents) (Double period for students with math deficiency)	Algebra 2/Trig (June Regents)	Earth Science (June Regents)	Chemistry (June Regents)	Spanish II or Hispanic Language and Culture (inter- disciplinary LOTE/history elective)	Spanish III (June LOTE exam; students fulfill Advanced Regents requirement but may continue on to Spanish IV)	Focus on successful academic behaviors
11	ELA 11 (January Regents Exam; re- take in June for college readiness score)	ELA 11 AP English Lit. (option to retake Regents in Jan. for college readiness score)	US History (Students repeating Global take Econ/Gov)	US History (June Regents)	Algebra 2/Trig (Students take a one-year or two-year course based on their needs)	Pre-Calculus	Chemistry (June Regents)	AP Biology		Spanish IV or Hispanic Language and Culture (inter- disciplinary LOTE/history elective)	Focus on college advising
12	ELA 12 College Readiness Writing Course	ELA 12 College English Seminar (partnership with local college)	Econ/Gov (at-risk students completed Econ/Gov and take US history (June Regents))	Econ/Gov	Algebra 2/Trig (2 of 2)	AP Calculus or Computer Science Elective	Marine Biology	Env. Science (partnership with local college)		AP Spanish	Focus on transition to postsecondary

Sample Teacher Schedule

Note: The junior class has a total of 100 students.

Period	Length (min)	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI
1	57	US History (Section 1) (34 Students)		US History (Section 1) (34 Students)		US History (Section 1) (34 Students)
2	57		<i>Grade 11 Advisory</i> (15 students)		<i>Grade 11 Advisory</i> (15 students)	<i>Grade 11 Advisory</i> (15 students)
3	57	Grade 11 Elective (section 2): Political Sci (20 students)	Common Planning Team Mtg	Grade 11 Elective (section 2): Political Sci (20 students)	Grade 11 Elective (section 2): Political Sci (20 students)	Common Planning Team Mtg
4	57	Grade 11 Elective (section 1): Political Sci (20 students)	Grade 11 Elective (section 1): Political Sci (20 students)		LUNCH	Grade 11 Elective (section 1): Political Sci (20 students)
5	45	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	Office Hours: Tutoring	LUNCH
6	57	US History (Section 2) (33 Students)		US History (Section 2) (33 Students)		US History (Section 2) (33 Students)
7	57		US History (Section 3) (33 Students)	US History (Section 3) (33 Students)	US History (Section 3) (33 Students)	

Based on the four-year program plan and the teacher schedule, identify the school's programming strategies and priorities, citing evidence from the four-year plan, the teacher schedule, or both:

	Evidence from the Four-Year Plan	Evidence from the Teacher Schedule
Which strategies has the school prioritized for ensuring that students graduate college and career ready? <ul style="list-style-type: none">••••		
Where is there evidence of differentiation? <ul style="list-style-type: none">••••		
How is support provided for students to get back on track if they deviate from the planned trajectory? <ul style="list-style-type: none">••••		
Where has the school made trade-offs? (time, resources, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none">••••		

Programming Resources Toolkit

The high school programming process is a collaborative effort to ensure that students are provided with the academic experiences needed to achieve college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school. This process includes the following components:

- **Vision:** Defining the outcomes students are expected to achieve by the end of grade 12 and the pathways available for achieving these outcomes. The vision is the school’s blueprint for how students will achieve college and career readiness through academic experiences.
- **Rules:** Ensuring that the vision is embedded in the relevant policy parameters and practical constraints. This includes academic policies, labor policies, and instructional mandates for special student populations.
- **Tools:** Using data, systems, and structures to create a master schedule aligned to the school’s vision and to assign students to academic programs based on their needs.

The table below describes evidence of strong programming practices in each of these three areas and provides additional resources to support effective programming. Find all of these resources here: intranet.nycboe.net/Accountability/APR/GradRequirements.

Component	Evidence of Strong Programming Practices	Resources
<p>VISION: Designing the pathways to college and career ready outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school articulates a vision for all students describing the outcomes students are expected to master by graduation, as measured by the completion of courses, exams, and other experiences. • The school describes the trajectories available to students for completing the expected outcomes by grade 12 in each subject area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This includes opportunities for enrichment and pathways for students who may need additional time and support to master the expected outcomes. • For students who need additional time and support to master the expected outcomes, the school has designed contingency plans to enable these students to complete the expected outcomes by grade 12. • The school has identified strategies for allocating teacher time to support students’ academic goals (e.g., common planning time for content area teachers and/or grade-level teams). • The school leader has invested school stakeholders, including administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, programmers, and students, in the school’s vision for college and career ready programming. • The school leader has established the roles and responsibilities of school staff members throughout the programming process. 	<p>Graduation Requirements and College and Career Readiness Benchmarks</p> <p>Alternative Programming Options</p> <p>Accreditation Committee Template</p> <p>High School Academic Policy Reference Guide and Resources</p>

<p>RULES:</p> <p>Understanding the policy parameters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school’s vision is embedded in a working knowledge of academic policy, including graduation requirements and policies for awarding credit. • The school’s vision aligns to the parameters of the NYCDOE school calendar and acknowledges the constraints and flexibility related to daily/weekly session time. • The school’s vision aligns to labor policies regarding teaching assignments and the SBO process. • The school’s vision for the master schedule includes the instructional mandates applicable to students with disabilities and English language learners. 	<p>Programming FAQ Labor FAQ Session Time Memo</p> <p>High School Academic Policy Reference Guide and Resources</p> <p>Calendar Change Request Process Guide to Flexible Programming for Students with Disabilities</p>
<p>TOOLS:</p> <p>Creating the master schedule and individual student schedules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school leader and staff have mapped out the desired master schedule based on students’ academic needs, students’ progress to completing the expected outcomes, and the school’s available resources. • The school’s programmer has a working knowledge of STARS, which enables him or her to craft the master schedule while identifying conflicts, trade-offs, and alternative options for school leaders. School staff collaborate to finalize a master schedule that best reconciles their vision for students with the constraints of available resources. • Students are assigned to courses based on student data and input from relevant teachers. Students with identified needs (students with disabilities, English language learners, and students requiring other academic interventions) are scheduled individually in consultation with the teachers directly supporting those students, as needed. • Systems and structures exist to ensure that students receive the correct schedule on the first day of the term. Changes to schedules are minimal, well-documented, and move students toward college and career ready outcomes. 	<p>STARS Wiki Guide to Programming in Cycles and Trimesters STARS Custom Reports, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.33: Final grades for a year or term • 1.67: Student graduation analysis