District
Management
Group

Managing Time:
Your Scarcest Resource

As districts consider adding more time to their school days and year or consider ways to make better use of the time they already have, these ten lessons learned may help guide the way.

TEN MISTAKES TO AVOID

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1 **DON'T ASSIGN SCHEDULING TO A NON-EXPERT.**

In many districts, creating school schedules is assigned to people without specific expertise, such as the principal or assistant principal. Scheduling is a complex challenge, and schedules should be made by expert schedulers.

2 **DON'T ASSUME TIME IS BEING SPENT AS PLANNED.**

Perception rarely matches reality. Detailed time study is often necessary to understand how staff are actually spending their time.

3 **DON'T SETTLE FOR THE DATA YOU HAVE.**

Despite its importance, districts often do not track how staff and students spend their time. Many perceive the costs of collecting this data to be too high, but the cost of not knowing is even greater.

4 **DON'T FORGET TO MANAGE ALL THE TIME IN THE DISTRICT.**

Faculty meetings, PLC time, data team meetings, and other blocks of time can all be utilized to support a district's strategic priorities.

5   DON'T HESITATE TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES.

Central office may not necessarily have all the answers, but can usually provide some valuable guidance to teachers, coaches, and therapists on how time should be spent.

6   DON'T SPREAD TIME TOO THIN.

One reason that time feels so scarce to many districts is that the number of initiatives—both for staff and for students—is so large. Too often, the time we have is spread so thin that little real learning can take place, leaving both staff and students frustrated.

7   DON'T DO IT BY HAND.

In order to analyze staff and student use of time and plan that time effectively, hundreds of thousands of data points can be required. While this is not a large number to computers, it is far more than any human can handle with pen and paper.

8   DON'T ADD MORE TIME WITHOUT REPURPOSING EXISTING TIME FIRST.

Many schools already have numerous meetings, but not all are focused on improving teacher effectiveness. Faculty meetings may be focused on administrative matters, data team meetings may be dedicated to number crunching, and full teacher days may be spent grading and setting up classrooms. Some of this time that is mostly administrative can be converted to PD time.

9   DON'T FORGET TO MONITOR CONTINUOUSLY.

Measuring how staff spend their time and how it compares to expectations is a great start. However, without periodic monitoring, it is difficult to know whether the use of time has changed or improved. Districts can fall into the same mindset as before: assuming that staff spend their time in accordance with guidelines, but never knowing for sure.

10   DON'T OVERLOOK THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY INSTRUCTION.

Never forget that teacher quality is the single most important factor that districts can leverage to raise student achievement. Simply adding more ineffective time is not likely to result in improved outcomes, but adding time with effective teachers is likely to have a large effect on student achievement.