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**03 | 31 | 2023**

Brief

# Providing Teachers More Time and Flexibility Through Innovative Scheduling



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Which scenario more accurately depicts teacher time in your school or district?

## Scenario 1

Between taking bites of a sandwich, a teacher opens the copy machine to fix a jam. As the final pages print, the teacher hurriedly looks at the clock to see if they have enough time for a quick bathroom break before they pick up their kids. As they walk briskly toward the bathroom, they nod at a colleague and make a mental note to ask the colleague a question after school.

## Scenario 2

A teacher greets their students before they depart for their weekly trip into the community with support staff. The teacher co-plans their lessons for the next week with their grade-level team then meets virtually with a therapist for 45 minutes. The teacher spends 2 hours grading papers and sending correspondence before having a walking meeting with the English language learner specialist to discuss how they will support two students next week.

Did you pick Scenario 1? You are not alone. Most teachers have limited flexibility in terms of their schedules, their opportunities for professional learning and collaboration, and how they use their time. However, recent data suggests that rethinking teacher time could be important to improving teacher recruitment and retention. In a [2022 report from Educators for Excellence](#) that surveyed 1,000 currently practicing educators nationwide:

- 19% of all respondents identified **more time for collaboration and planning** and 15% identified **more autonomy in the classroom** as one of the factors that would most likely keep teachers in the profession.<sup>1</sup>
- More educators identifying as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (41%) selected **more professional learning and support** as a key factor for keeping teachers in the profession—higher than salary (22%).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The survey asked respondents to prioritize two of the following: higher salary, more time for collaboration and planning, more support staff, more mental health support for educators, more professional development and support, more autonomy in the classroom, more leadership opportunities while continuing to teach in the classroom, more supportive administrators, and more societal respect for the profession.

<sup>2</sup> The survey asked respondents to prioritize two of the following: streamlined certification/reciprocity, raising the bar for entry to the profession, residency programs for hands-on experience, alternative certification pathways, pathways for school aides and paraprofessionals to become teachers, leadership pathways in your school or district that allow you to increase your responsibilities and your salary, and making it easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits, seniority, or other non-retirement benefits.

- 40% of survey respondents thought that **making it easier to leave and return to teaching without losing retirement benefits, seniority, or other non-retirement benefits** was a key factor in attracting talented and diverse candidates to the teaching profession.

How can districts and schools provide teachers more flexibility and enable more time for planning, collaboration, and professional learning? This brief provides an overview of the various types of workplace flexibility and shares three examples of districts in Indiana (Randolph Eastern School Corporation, Success Academy, and Northeastern Wayne School Corporation) where leadership is using innovative scheduling to support teacher autonomy and flexibility.

## Types of Flexibility

Kossek et al. (2015) identify four types of workplace flexibility:



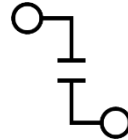
### Schedule

When you work



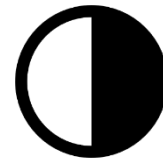
### Place

Where you work



### Continuity

Leave temporarily without penalty



### Workload

Amount you work

Some of these flexibilities are more common in education than others. For example, sick and vacation days commonly found in teacher contracts provide short-term **continuity flexibility**. Some districts provide employees additional continuity flexibility through paid or unpaid leaves, fellowships, or sabbaticals to attend to life circumstances or pursue a new opportunity without permanently leaving their positions. Part-time positions and job-share options provide educators some **workload flexibility** by enabling them to work part-time.

Flexibility in **schedule** and **place** often requires reimagining the typical school day. The following profiles share examples of how superintendents are rethinking the school day to provide teachers more time, more autonomy for how they spend that time, and more flexibility in how and where they work. As you read, think about which of the four types of flexibility are offered to teachers who work in your district.



## Spotlight on Randolph Eastern School Corporation

### Rethinking Secondary School Schedules to Offer Teachers More Autonomy and Students More Choice in a Rural District

How do you recruit new teachers to a rural school? In a recent conversation, educators at Randolph Eastern School Corporation in Union City dug deep into recruitment and retention challenges after noticing that multiple teachers would reach retirement age in the next few years. When thinking about how to recruit people into the profession, conversations emphasized that people want to work in a place with a positive school culture that also offers them flexibility and autonomy in how they use their time. Building upon previous professional learning around blended learning, the district set out to pilot a new teaching model that also provides more time for students to engage in project-based learning.

#### 2022–23 Pilot of a Hybrid Teaching Model

Randolph Eastern School Corporation is currently piloting a hybrid teaching model in which participating teachers provide in-person instruction 2 or 3 days a week instead of 5. On the other days, students use the classroom as workspaces and have voice and choice in their learning. Students focus on what they think they need to work on, and often use the time to engage in career and technical education or pathway coursework.

Participation in the hybrid teaching model is not required. All participating teachers engage in extended training on blended learning prior to joining the pilot. Eight teachers are trained, and that number will likely expand next year. On days when they are not providing in-person instruction, teachers are usually present in classrooms as supervisors, but they are able to use that time to plan and prepare. The schedule also makes it easier for teachers to schedule personal appointments on days when they are not providing in-person instruction. “We try to get them coverage for appointments when we can,” Superintendent Aaron Black explained in a recent interview. “We’d rather have them here for 80% of the day than have them take a half or full day off” because of inflexible policies.

Feedback on the pilot has been positive to date. During focus groups in November, parents shared that they loved the project-based learning happening in the school. The students appreciated being trusted to have some choice in how they spend their time. It may be too soon to tell if this pilot has had an impact on recruitment, but, in January, Randolph Eastern hired a new teacher who had heard about the pilot and thought it would be helpful in attracting other new teachers.

#### 2023–24 Pilot of a New School Schedule

The district is using lessons learned from this year to pilot a new schedule next year. In 2023–24, Wednesday will be a flex day at the junior and senior high schools. On Wednesdays, support staff will supervise students’ project-based learning so teachers can use that time to plan, assess, engage in professional learning communities, and provide remedial support as needed.

Wednesdays are also when standardized tests and field trips will be scheduled, thus preserving instructional time on the other days.

### **Focus on School Culture**

Randolph Eastern School Corporation benefits from a strong school culture and high teacher retention rate. Part of the strong culture includes professional learning and social-emotional support opportunities for educators. Educators can personalize their professional learning by identifying relevant activities in the Learning Lab and receiving compensation for the time they are engaged in those activities. The district also offers educators after-school activities, including yoga, book clubs, and a walking club. These activities give educators time and space to connect with each other after school. These offerings have been well attended by educators, who appreciate how the district values educator mental health.



## Spotlight on Success Academy

### Leveraging Community Assets to Provide More Time and Support to Teachers at the Elementary Level

A new school is coming to South Bend in the fall of 2023—at the Boys & Girls Club. Success Academy, an established secondary grades charter school, is partnering with the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County to open a new elementary school. The new school will be using an innovative model that will provide flexibility and collaboration time to teachers and improved opportunities for students, families, and support staff members. Housing the school at the Boys & Girls Club uses space that would otherwise be empty during the school day while offering parents a centrally located option with built-in services. Students can attend before care, school, and after care all at one location served by the same staff—increasing convenience for families and providing students with increased opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with adults in their school.

#### Schedule Design

Each classroom of 25 students will be led by a certified teacher and a Boys & Girls Club youth development professional (YDP) 4 days a week. YDPs are staff members “trained in youth development practices to provide children and teams with high-quality experiences that support their current and long-term success” (Boys & Girls Club of America, 2023). Monday through Thursday, students will benefit from the co-teaching model and engage in project-based learning. On Fridays, the YDPs will take students into the local community and facilitate experiential learning. Before and after each school day, families can access on-site before and after school care provided by Boys & Girls Club staff.

#### A Mutually Beneficial Partnership

This partnership has the potential to benefit multiple stakeholders:

- **Teachers** – Teachers benefit from co-teaching support from YDPs and gain schedule flexibility on Fridays to use that time for planning, professional learning, and other responsibilities.
- **YDPs** – YDPs work alongside and learn from certified teachers and have an opportunity to build sustained relationships with students.
- **Students** – Students learn from two trusted adults and have increased opportunities to meaningfully engage in their communities. Through weekly field trips into the community, students will gain exposure to high-wage, high-demand careers early in their schooling experience.
- **Families** – Success Academy at the Boys & Girls Club offers families a new school option in the center of downtown South Bend that is embedded in the community. Parents do not need to coordinate additional before and after care plans because it is available on-site and provided by the same staff members involved in the regular school day.



### Looking Ahead

At the time of writing, Success Academy at Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Joseph County was just beginning to recruit a principal and teachers. But academy Superintendent Jeremy Lugbill sees the unique schooling model as a potential selling feature for recruitment: “This model is new and distinct, and I think it is going to attract teachers who want to expose kids to career opportunities, who want to implement project-based learning, and who want to get into the community. We have an opportunity to really attract the best talent and outside-the-box thinkers.”

***Interested in learning more about Success Academy?*** See the [Success Academy at the Boys & Girls Club website](#).



## Spotlight on Northeastern Wayne School Corporation

### Changing School Schedules to Support Teachers and Students at the Secondary Level

In the fall of 2023, the middle and high school schedules at Northeastern Wayne School Corporation will undergo a complete reorganization. The impetus for this came from the middle and high school administrators' desire to improve teachers' work schedules—as well as student learning experiences. During the height of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, these administrators took note of neighboring districts that altered schedules to ease the burden of dealing with COVID-19 mitigation strategies such as contact tracing and sanitation efforts. Reflecting on the needs of their district and increases in enrollment affecting class sizes, particularly at the middle school level, the administrators decided the time was right to rethink the traditional secondary schedule with both the teachers' and students' best interests in mind.

#### 2023–24 New Secondary School Schedule

Northeastern Wayne is changing from a traditional schedule of seven class periods per day to a modified four-block schedule Monday through Thursday and an eight-block on Friday. This change in schedule is intended to facilitate improvements for both teachers and students.

- **What does this look like for teachers?** Teachers will teach fewer classes per day and will also see an increase in their preparation time. For two of the four-block days, teachers will have a full block for preparation. On the eight-block day, teachers will also have a miniprep period built into their schedule. Superintendent Dr. Matthew Hicks noted, “The traditional schedule is mentally and physically exhausting for teachers.” The goal of changing the schedule is to “make it a little more tenable as a profession.” The schedule change also aims to build in more flexible time every day for teachers beyond their preparation period. The schedule will include Student Resource Time (SRT) that can be used as “soft time” for teachers if they need this time for activities such as running errands. These changes are in addition to a 30-minute duty-free lunch. With less transition time in the day and longer blocks of instruction, teachers also gain more dedicated time for focusing on teaching core class periods. The high school science department is particularly excited about the opportunity to include more laboratory time in their lessons. Dr. Hicks noted that their chemistry teacher is “over the moon” to have the time to design and lead students through more sophisticated experiments.
- **How do students benefit?** There are several benefits administrators hope students will experience once this change is in place. Under the new schedule, students are engaged for longer stretches of class time with less homework across fewer classes. At the middle school level, the traditional schedule has constrained what can be offered in addition to requirements. The new schedule will allow the school to offer more electives so students can try out more things before they enter high school. At the high school level, the new schedule





will provide additional time for students to be engaged in meaningful internship opportunities. Under the traditional schedule, students participate in an internship in the seventh period of the school day. Given the short nature of this period, students have very little time to participate. By the time they arrive at the internship, they might only have 25 minutes and then must return to school if they need transportation. If students opt to stay longer, they must do so on their own time and with their own transportation, which is a barrier for many. The new schedule will allow for a minimum of 1.5 hours of functional internship experience for students. Dr. Hicks noted the business community is excited about this as they have seen success with other schools.

### Managing Change

As the drivers of this change, district and school administrators are very positive about the potential improvements it will bring next year. However, they are aware that any change can be perceived differently by teachers and the community. Given this, administrators are ready to support teachers through this transition to the new schedule, particularly for any teacher who might be concerned about doing things a new way. They are also being thoughtful in communication about the change to the community. The hope is that once the schedule is in place and all have adjusted to the changes, teachers and community members will wish they had done this sooner.



## Questions and Resources for Reflection and Discussion

Use the questions below to reflect on your own context.

### Reflecting on the three district profiles:

- How did school and district leadership engage stakeholders in the design and implementation of the innovative scheduling model?
- What types of flexibility are present (schedule, place, continuity, and workload) in the three district profiles?
- Which profile is most relevant to your district/school context? Why?
- After reading the three profiles of Indiana districts, how are you thinking differently about flexibility for teachers? What do you want to know more about?

### Reflecting on your context:

- What types of flexibility (schedule, place, continuity, and workload) does your district/school currently offer? What does the flexibility look like?
- Do you know which type(s) of flexibility your current teachers value most? Your prospective teachers? If you are unsure, how could you find out that information?
- How, if at all, have you considered providing teachers more flexibility through innovative scheduling?
- What are the opportunities and barriers to providing teachers more flexibility?



### Additional Resources

[\*Teaching Innovation: New School Staffing Strategies Inspired by the Pandemic\*](#) (FutureEd) – This report shares innovative staffing and scheduling strategies that some schools and districts implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifies enabling conditions, and discusses barriers moving forward.

[\*The Next Education Workforce: Team-Based Staffing Models Can Make Schools Work Better for Both Learners and Educators\*](#) (American Enterprise Institute) – In this brief, the authors provide an example of team-based staffing and how it offers increased opportunities for differentiated instruction, improved teacher collaboration, and teacher leadership. The authors summarize early results from Arizona State University’s Next Education Workforce initiative and share implications for preparation and professional learning.

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The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, by the Region 8 Comprehensive Center at ICF under Award #S283B190013. This contains resources that are provided for the reader's convenience. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, enterprise, curriculum, or program of instruction mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.