

The Master Schedule: A Culture Indicator

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If you want to know what makes a teacher tick, have a conversation with that teacher about grading, and examine the teacher's grading policies. The approach that teachers take in assigning grades to students reveals more about them than it says about student achievement. A grading policy reveals a teacher's mindset—their innermost thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and values about human beings, about their students, and about what motivates them and what they believe motivates their students.

Punitive grading policies may be more damaging to student motivation than any other factor. Teachers, who believe that students are motivated by fear of punishment, use grades as a threat to frighten their students. Conversely, teachers who believe that students thrive on encouragement use grades as feedback and as a form of recognition.

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, and they have aligned their curriculum with state standards. 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. There are no reading classes. 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. Finally, in adult-focused schools, teachers with seniority are teaching only higher-level courses, no standard courses.

In student- or learning-focused schools, the master schedule reflects the needs of the students. There are multiple, tiered interventions. Instead of one reading intervention, there may be three or more. There are flexible time slots that allow students to progress at their own rates. 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.

The development of the master schedule in an adult-focused school is a closed process. One person behind closed doors builds the master schedule. Staff is asked to submit requests, but final decisions rest in the hands of one or very few people. Those staff members with an "in" get what they want. The others get the leftovers. This sets up a pecking order and clicks within the faculty. In these schools, you will frequently hear about veteran teachers "bullying" newer teachers.

Conversely, the development of the master schedule in student-focused schools is an open process. Schools that are focused on student needs are set up to develop a customized learning plan for each student. Because mass customization is expensive in terms of time, effort, knowledge, expertise, and resources, the staff works collaboratively in teams set up to best meet the needs of each student. The development of the master schedule is a team effort, the result of the work of several teams throughout the school.

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!

Master Schedule Look 4s

1. The master schedule is the result of a schoolwide collaborative effort and every teacher has input into "what" is taught.
2. Based upon an analysis of data related to student performance, teachers and teams of teachers provide input into the "what" and "where" on courses being taught.
3. Administrators, counselors, and teacher leaders make final decisions regarding assignments collaboratively. There are no secrets!
4. Scheduling decisions are changed only when those teachers directly involved are consulted.
5. Special need populations (special education, students with assessed reading or math weaknesses, and ELL) are individually scheduled.
6. Teachers in content areas (math, science, social studies, English) make specific scheduling recommendations to counselors.
7. Every student, particularly every struggling student, has a personalized learning plan that meets his or her individual learning needs.
8. The best teachers teach the neediest students.
9. The neediest students are taught in the smallest class settings.
10. There are multiple, tiered interventions for all struggling learners.
11. There are flexible time allotments within key core content courses. As a result, teachers have the time they need to teach and students have the time they need to learn.
12. Teachers who teach higher-level courses (honors, AP, IB) also teach standard courses.

