

Foreword

Restructuring refers to fundamentally changing the way an organization conducts its “business,” be that making cars or educating youth. This book provides insights into perhaps the most powerful tool for restructuring secondary schools by showing how alternative schedules can be put in place that compel better planning by teachers and enable them to provide more in-depth learning experiences for their students. Years ago someone said you have to construct schools to get in the way of bad teaching, and the same can certainly be said for building the daily schedule that provides the basis for teaching and learning activities.

Pressures have been on secondary schools for many years to improve their effectiveness. The symptoms of dysfunction are well known by now to most people even though the symptoms are not present in all schools—low rates of attendance, large gaps in student achievement levels between subgroups in today’s diverse student bodies, and a high dropout rate in many schools. The press tends to focus much more on these issues than it does on the accomplishments of schools, which are numerous and noteworthy.

There have been many changes in society that are well known to teachers and administrators but it is often very difficult to figure out what to do about them. The United States continues to have large numbers of immigrants arriving every year, often with limited English skills. Teachers often find it difficult to collaborate with parents in the education process because many students have only one parent at home, if any. The powerful influence of other educative factors in a teenager’s life such as television, movies, computers, and technology-based “toys” is often much more compelling than a lecture or other passive learning activities. Parents often find it difficult to get their children involved in traditional family activities because their children find the activities “boring.”

One problem in planning to deal with these dysfunctional systems and societal changes is that very often well-meaning politicians make the situation worse by enacting legislation that actually promotes “drill and kill” learning activities. This is much to the dismay of teachers who have lost instructional time for exploratory activities out of the necessity to improve test scores. However, one could argue that we educators asked for it by not coming up with our own aggressive solutions for dealing with low achievement, poor attendance, and bored students.

Now is the time for the profession to provide the school-based leadership required to overcome the weaknesses schools continue to exhibit year after year.

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Unless school leaders and teachers want more intrusive legislation with honorable intentions but undesirable side effects, now is the time to restructure their middle and high schools. It is time to implement schedules that will enable teachers to regularly engage in planning learning activities of rich intellectual content aimed at exacting standards. *Too many of today's class periods are of short duration and thus limit extended learning activities and the use of teaching and assessment strategies that must be implemented to ensure mastery of standards on a daily and weekly basis.*

One ought not to underestimate the difficulty of changing a school schedule that has been in place for many years, and the authors have not done so, as seen in the time they devote to explaining reasons why secondary schools must change. They have done this to encourage school leaders to engage teachers in discussions that focus on making the case for change, before leaders attempt to plan specific changes themselves. This reflects the extensive experience and expertise the authors have that qualifies them to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various schedules along with the specific processes and factors that must be considered in planning for implementation.

Careful attention is given to helping teachers plan to work in teams and begin to function as a learning community. Such a community requires participants to grow professionally and benefit from the experience of their colleagues. Teachers and teams must assume responsibility for achieving results, and until they do we will see more "test and punish" legislation. It is unlikely that restructuring a school can truly be accomplished unless the basic pattern of daily classes provides for extended learning periods and time for teachers to work together in facing the realities of what students are bringing to their classes early in the 21st century.

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