

Best Practices Newsletter

A Laser Focus on Student Learning and Achievement

If schools are to truly prepare students for college and careers, they must provide teachers time for instructional planning, align academic and career and technical education assignments to the workplace and secure internships and co-ops that allow students to get authentic workplace experiences.

This newsletter focuses on ways to use time wisely to get the most out of teaching and learning, expose students to career opportunities and use new literacy and math tools to advance student achievement.



School Schedules That Maximize Teacher Collaboration and Student Success

Teachers have a full plate and are often juggling increased demands on their time — teaching classes, grading papers, meeting with students, contacting parents, supervising organizations, keeping records and completing reports. They rarely have time for professional development (PD) during the regular school workweek.

But district and school leaders are realizing they must find time and resources to enable teachers to collaborate with each other and have the professional development needed for improved teaching and learning. Some are turning to TimeWise Schools design experts to redesign their schedules. TimeWise uses the School by Design™ software and approach to create smarter schedules within current budgets.

TimeWise works with districts to find ongoing time embedded in the school day for teacher PD. “Our work is to help people rethink how they use time to make better conditions for teachers to deliver and students to learn,” said **Jennifer Frentress**, a TimeWise school designer.

Finding More Time

“The way you find more time is by using the time you have differently,” Frentress maintained. One approach TimeWise uses is to increase class time for students. Most school years are 180 days. If administrators find one minute every day to save — such as from lunch or changing classes — then schools can add half of a school day to classroom time. If students can have five fewer minutes to eat lunch, then more time can be added for instruction.

Another approach addresses class length. For example, short class periods may not allow teachers enough time to prepare the kind of hands-on, project-based lessons that would get students ready for college and careers; schools need to find more run- time to fit more innovative instructional strategies, Frentress mused.

Another useful strategy involves finding PD time for teachers by developing a so-called “PLUS” team of teachers who teach classes while others have professional development. They are considered a super team of teachers who can be relied on to teach students instead of having to use substitute teachers in the classroom. The PLUS team may teach courses, provide credit recovery, teach qualities such as career-ready skills, offer students opportunity for community-based experiences and a host of other options.

PLUS teachers are made up in a variety of ways. Using School by Design, TimeWise can help leaders find PLUS teachers by increasing efficiency in use of staff. Some schools use what’s called non-load bearing staff — counselors, deans, coaches — to deliver instruction in their field. For example, counselors might be scheduled to take over English or science classes and provide career planning supports several times in a school year while those teachers have professional development during that time.



Jennifer Frentress
TimeWise School
Designer

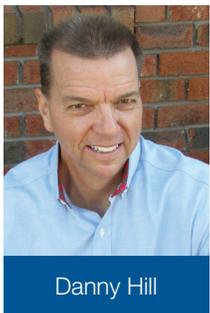
Evidence of Success

Charlie McDaniel, principal of **East Ridge Middle School** in Florida, adjusted his class size, developed a PLUS team from existing teachers to fill in for his content teachers and managed to get one full day of PD every other week, allowing teachers time to develop lessons for student work. The school's rating went from a B to an A in one year. McDaniel found extra time by pushing up class size a little bit and by using blended learning in his classrooms — taking advantage of a Florida policy that supported this strategy.

If leaders make job-embedded time available to teachers to design lessons, then student outcomes are improved. “It’s professionalizing the profession,” said Frentress. Teachers respond very favorably to being given PD time within their school day to develop lessons and improve their practice. According to Frentress, “They feel that their learning is being prioritized and not something they have to do on their own, after school or on weekends.”

Contacts: Jennifer Frentress: jenniferfrentress3@gmail.com; Charlie McDaniel: mcdanielc@lake.k12.fl.us

Too Much on Your Plate



Teachers have too much on their plates because they are hoarding nonessential practices that take away from student learning. That’s the contention of consultant, author and former principal **Danny Hill**.

“The number one thing that teachers spend too much time on is grading homework,” said Hill. “That has nothing to do with learning,” he added. Homework comprises practice assignments for learning; it’s formative assessment. He maintains in a typical school, teachers indicate only a third of students are doing assignments anyway; one-third cheat off other students; and one-third don’t turn in the assignments at all. So why grade assignments that students do out of class or that they cheat on, Hill asked rhetorically.

“We used to say to kids, do your work. That’s a waste of time. Take it off your plate; it doesn’t work. We used to say bring up your grades; it doesn’t work.” When teachers stop thinking they must grade everything, Hill said they clean their plates and start to feel a sense of freedom. Teachers need to be fixated on learning, not grades, he insists.

The Power of ICU

To get teachers and students in that mindset, Hill said it often requires a cultural shift in schools, a greater sense of student accountability and adherence to the “Power of ICU” philosophy. “The Power of ICU is a formula for student success, said Hill. The formula is: quality assignments + assignment completion + healthy grading. All must work in tandem; one cannot work without the other says Hill. The goal is to decrease student apathy and have every student complete every assignment.

Quality Assignments

Questions that should be asked as a litmus test for quality assignments include: Can the learning standard be easily identified? Does the student know what the learning target is? If the assignment is not tied to a learning standard, teachers need to rethink whether the assignment is worth giving, Hill contends.

Getting students to complete every assignment is not an easy task, but it’s also not as difficult as one might think. First, extrinsic motivators like threatening students with grades or rewarding them with things like free pizzas only have temporary success, and they are wearing teachers out. They need to take it off their plate says Hill.

Instead he says intrinsic motivators work. For example, show students a list of what they owe, then let them “work it.” “When students have input in how they work it, when they work it and what they need, we drastically increase the adult-student communication, and it leads to long-term change,” Hill insists. He seeks to debunk the theory that students won’t do assignments if teachers don’t grade them. He calls it a myth and maintains that teachers all over the country are beginning to realize, “The grade is not the motivation in the first place; learning is.”

Evidence of Success

Hill offers professional development and coaching in the Power of ICU to schools across the country. He says success stories are numerous. For example, he indicates Hot Springs High School in Hot Springs, South Dakota, implemented the program during the 2011-12 school year and saw the total number of F’s schoolwide drop from 66 in the 2010-11 school year to 29 in 2011-12. Huron Middle School in Huron, South Dakota, started the program in the 2012-13 school year and every student passed every subject that year.

Contact: Danny Hill: dannyhill@poweroficu.com

Explore Potential Career Pathways Through Quality Work-Site Learning

Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical Center (UCT) in Bourne, Massachusetts, has increased students' opportunities to experience real-world work. The center partners with businesses in the community that provide students unpaid internships.

While the tech center had been working with the automotive industry in the area previously via paid co-op opportunities, it wanted to expand opportunities to "get students into the shops and working," said automotive instructor **David Aguiar**. Juniors and seniors are transported to various job sites. This allows them to see the various opportunities available to them from working in a major retail auto parts store to working in small and large automotive shops.

Diversified Exposure

Students in the internship program also get the opportunity to work in different automotive business settings throughout their time in the program, which allows them to explore various career pathways. As Aguiar stated, "One shoe does not fit everybody; finding your niche and enjoying what you are doing is the best payment. It's a priceless education."

The internships are invaluable to the students' automotive education because they get on-the-job experience. For example, while the students are able to learn to change brakes in their course work, their instruction is slow and meticulous so that students learn every aspect of a brake job. During an internship at a commercial garage, they get to see how the process is completed in the real world. Students also get to work with cars and technology that may not be available to them in their school shop.

How Are We Doing?

Aguiar explained the school shop is limited in the cars and technology that are available for students, but during an internship a student may get the opportunity to work on a fully electric car or a recreational vehicle — experience they would have never received without the internship. To receive feedback on their students in the field, UCT asks the businesses to rate the students' attitude, work ethic, general knowledge and appearance while on the job.

The feedback forms allow the school to see where students are doing well and where they need to improve. As part of the internship, the students are also responsible for keeping a journal of what they did and what they learned in the field. Seniors also participate in interview sessions designed to prepare them for securing employment after graduation.

Making It Pay

The internship program is intended to be a pipeline for students to receive a paid co-op position with one of the businesses they work with during their internship period. In the past three years, UCT has partnered with 27 different businesses. Eighty-seven students have been through the internship program working over 1,119 total days.

An auto body shop that was part of the program has hired seven out of their nine shop employees from UCT. The center has seen a 53 percent increase in the number of students who have participated in the co-op program (from 59 students in 2011-2012 to 111 students in the 2013-2014 school year.) The three-year increase is attributed to a strategic plan the director set up that involved creating the internship program, reorganizing cooperative education and continuously reaching out the community.

Everybody Benefits

The internship program is beneficial to local business, students and the school. It is advantageous to local business because there is no cost to them; they do not have to be concerned with providing workman's compensation because the students are covered under the center's insurance. The center benefits from the process of networking and building relationships in the community.

Contact: David Aguiar: daguiar@uppercapetech.org

Addressing the Needs of New and Veteran CTE Teachers

The days of simply teaching “shop” are over! To be competitive and succeed in the current job market, students must learn from real-world experience. An excellent way to achieve this is for real-world practitioners to enter the classroom and impart their knowledge to students.

Need for Professional Development

According to Teaching to Lead director Nancy Headrick, SREB data show that 74 percent of teachers with less than five years teaching career and technical education (CTE) entered the profession through an alternate route. This means alternatively certified CTE teachers typically have no prior preparation for teaching.



According to the SREB data, over two-thirds of new teachers have expressed the need for professional development (PD) pertaining to instructional planning, embedding academics, instructional strategies, and classroom management and motivation. The Teaching to Lead model is designed to increase early career CTE teachers’ competence, sense of self-efficacy and career commitment. The framework for this model includes high quality, professional development and high-quality school-based support.

“Teaching to Lead is helping new teachers enter the teaching profession with an understanding of what it means to be a teacher and the level of commitment it takes. The teachers learn how to create teaching experiences that are challenging for students, how to manage a classroom of diverse students and develop assessment tools to provide student feedback. The teachers come together as a community of learners and share ideas, resources and model strategies,” Headrick said.

Headrick noted the components of the professional development includes 10 days of PD prior to the school year; three, two-day sessions throughout the school year and another 10 days of training the summer after the first year teaching. SREB and the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education (NRCCTE) developed the research-based induction model of professional development to assist new CTE teachers to make a successful transition for preparing students for further learning and a career. The professional development can be used by states, school districts and schools for new and existing teachers who need to calibrate their skills to the 21st-century learner.

Teacher Reception

CTE teachers participating in Teaching to Lead professional development said the program was very successful in helping them traverse a new career field, said Headrick. The information learned in the courses were right on track with what they were experiencing in their new working environment. They liked the cohort model because it engendered a sense of community. Even though much of the course work is online, teachers started to develop a closeness or bond with their fellow classmates via the discussion boards. They also liked the fact that in the cohort model they had the same teacher for the two years of training, which meant their teachers became familiar with their needs and struggles.

Adapting to Change

Although the new CTE teachers did not initially like the idea of being required to sit with a mentor and their school director, they felt this motivated them to seek advice that they would not otherwise seek. The new CTE teachers expressed how relevant and timely the training/course work was to their experiences in the classroom.

For veteran CTE teachers, there are advanced courses which are part of a PD + Course credit model. These courses also focus on SREB’s Teaching to Lead Modules, building on the teacher’ experience and materials. Veteran teachers expressed how relevant their training was to their stage in teaching CTE and how happy they were with their training. They also expressed how beneficial it would have been to have received the training models the new CTE teachers are receiving.

Alternative CTE Teacher Certification: Missouri’s Model

Larae Watkins and **Michelle Conrad** of the Missouri Center for Career Education, University of Central Missouri, have developed a hybrid course model for certification that requires eight courses to be completed over a two-year period. Each semester consists of two courses ranging from six to eight weeks; each course requires online participation as well as two to three face-to-face classes. The teachers in the new certification program work together in a cohort model, so they become a community of learners.

According to Conrad, Missouri, used Teaching to Lead as the basis for its courses, adding competencies for two additional courses (Education of the Exceptional Child and Vocational Guidance) required for CTE certification in Missouri, and built a two-year program of integrated, hybrid courses to replace the traditional course work for CTE alternative certification.

“We built the new courses to be “just-in-time” instruction that is presented regionally throughout the state in a cohort model. The same instructor stays with the new teachers for the two years of courses and many of the assignments are the authentic tasks and administrator and mentor dialogues from the Teaching to Lead model. We did have to add some reading, papers, discussion boards, etc. to fulfill university credit requirements, but we are finding that the new model builds a safe community of learners around the new teacher and is providing more support for the teachers coming straight from industry into the classroom,” she said.

Contacts: Michelle Conrad, mconrad@ucmo.edu; Nancy Headrick: nancy.headrick@sreb.org; Larae Watkins: lwatkins@ucmo.edu

Using HSTW to Support Teachers and Students

Four years ago, **Belton High School** (BHS) refashioned its game plan to help students attain higher levels of achievement. Using the High Schools That Work (HSTW) framework and leveraging the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) and the Mathematics Design Collaborative (MDC) strategies as its foundation, teachers and school leaders were able to increase teacher collaboration and modify the daily schedule to include more time for extra help.

The suburban school in Belton, Missouri, serves nearly 1,000 students in grades 10 through 12. The student population is 75 percent white, 13 percent black and 9 percent Hispanic, with half the students receiving free- or reduced-price lunches. Classes operate on an eight-block schedule, with alternating A/B days.

To address the gaps in extra help and guidance revealed in a 2012 HSTW assessment, the school created three focus teams (Curriculum and Instruction, Student Focus, and Pirate Pride and Culture), with technology support and professional development embedded for all teams.

Core academic professional learning communities (PLCs) and data teams were revamped to meet once a week to address planning and to discuss what was working, what didn't work and how to meet their goals.



Extra Help

The most pressing needs involved extra help and guidance. It was clear that struggling students needed more attention, but time was an issue. “We were having a hard time getting kids to stay late or come early,” said **Martijn Keltner**, a chemistry teacher.

The solution? Increasing academic focus time from 30 minutes a week to 275 minutes a week. To build the time into the daily schedule, instructional time was reduced a mere five minutes per block (from 85 minutes to 80 minutes), with the transition time between bells also reduced.

This extra time was named PAL (Pirate Achievement Labs) and allowed for more extra help, assemblies, team planning, co-curricular organization meetings and ACT practice sessions.

Pirate Achievement Labs

By the 2014-15 school year, extra help/intervention was required for students with a D or an F three to four days a week. Students with four or more F's were placed into special sessions with a teacher and a counselor for in-depth intervention. An ACT prep session was also offered on Fridays.

To begin the PAL process, teachers pulled grade reports every two weeks and worked together to determine which students were earning D's and F's and which were earning A's, B's and C's. Academic teachers assigned students to the teachers they needed to see during PAL time using a Google Sheet. The PAL coordinator finalized PAL assignments and created an attendance sheet.

Students received their extra-help schedule by Monday and saw their assigned academic focus teachers Tuesday through Thursday. Teachers used the attendance sheet to keep track of students; if a student skips, it's quickly known and there are immediate consequences.

“The PAL time has enabled my students to get additional help outside of the classroom — usually with a smaller class size — allowing for more one-on-one interactions. This is also a great way for my students to get caught up if they have missed class, especially for making up tests and quizzes,” said Keltner.

“One of the biggest takeaways is that my students are more aware and concerned about their grades in my classes, constantly asking what they can do to get their grades up, especially if that is the only class that might prevent them from our Gold Pass privileges,” said Keltner.

Students who are able to maintain a grade of C or higher earn a Gold Pass during PAL time. They are allowed to study in the library, hang out in the cafeteria, play sports in the gym or attend teacher-led activities such as the art club, blood drive, robotics, etc.

Literacy Strategies

Three years ago, a team from Belton High School attended the Southern Regional Education Board’s (SREB’s) first College- and Career-Readiness Standards Networking Conference and learned about the literacy and math instructional design systems known as LDC and MDC.

LDC uses modules — two to four weeks of instruction comprising a student performance task — to advance students reading, writing and comprehension skills. [Read more.](#)

SREB trainer **Lynda Gillespie** provided five days of training for 18 faculty members, including staff from the freshman center and middle grades school.



Every teacher in every content area was required to teach LDC modules. “LDC is awesome,” said **Laura Gibson**, an English language arts teacher. “No matter how imperfect the implementation, the results were still better than before.”

Other teachers, like Keltner, were hesitant. “As a science teacher, I could write lab reports, but I didn’t know how to teach writing a paper.” He sought help from one of the school’s English teachers and developed a module that required students to write a script for a video on gas laws. “Once others saw the product didn’t have to be a paper, teachers and students bought into it,” he said.

“Using the LDC modules has really shown me how much (or little) my students actually comprehend a topic. Many kids can easily put in some time to study for a multiple choice test, but having a large written assignment can show the depth of their knowledge,” said Keltner.

During the 2014-15 school year, LDC-trained staff members trained PLC members and created additional modules as a team. Teachers taught a minimum of one module per semester, with ELA teachers teaching two per semester. Professional development and support continue to be provided to help teachers refine their skills and collaborate.

The effects of LDC have been far reaching, including more nonfiction reading and more frequent/structured writing in all subject areas. Students have become less apprehensive about writing, says Gibson, and they are starting to see how multiple subject areas relate to one another.

Math Strategies

MDC helps students develop mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills and build fluency with their procedural skills. It uses formative assessment lessons or classroom challenges to help teachers detect whether students truly understand the math concepts taught.

After a week of formal training for 12 teachers, led by SREB’s Gail Snider MDC formative assessment lessons were also included in district’s curriculum. All math teachers in grades seven to 12 were expected to perform one formative assessment lesson per quarter.

Math teacher **Nick Civitello** said the transition was easier for math departments because MDC Classroom Challenges matched the traditional data team cycle process originally used by their PLCs.

“MDC has transformed my classroom in just about every way I can think of. I can count on a high level of engagement from all of my students from bell to bell, and in the end, I am spending less energy and my students are taking more away.”

Civitello said students think he’s a great math teacher, but his success, he says, is due in part to MDC strategies and questioning techniques. “The students eat it up and it’s proven to be very effective. I get the comment all the time that mine is the first math class that they have ever looked forward to.”



As part of the effort to prepare students for college, a foundations of college math course was created to help bridge students from Algebra II to college algebra. It was originally based on two remedial math classes Civitello was teaching at a local community college.

“Last year at the HSTW conference I picked up a copy of SREB’s Math Ready curriculum and I modified “foundations” to make use of it. Instead of a one intensive semester, as Math Ready is intended to be, I stretched it over the course of two semesters and supplemented it with other MDC activities. The class is so popular that it is tough to get into,” he said.

Contacts: Nick Civitello: ncivitello@bsd124.org; Laura Gibson: lgibson@bsd124.org; Martijn Keltner: mkeltner@bsd124.org



Follow us on Facebook and
Twitter [@SREBPDPrograms](https://twitter.com/SREBPDPrograms)

For more information about the school improvement models offered by SREB, contact Gene Bottoms, senior vice president, at gene.bottoms@sreb.org or call (404) 875-9211.