

MTSS Quick Reference Guide: Scheduling within a Tiered System of Support Elementary School

This quick reference guide is intended to provide administrators with guidance when developing a master schedule that supports a tiered system of instruction and support. It is recommended that a school-wide scheduling committee be formed to engage the school personnel, parents and community members in the process.

The following guiding principles are central to the success of any schedule within a tiered model:

- all students engage in curriculum that is aligned with the curriculum frameworks;
- all students participate in robust and responsive core instruction (Tier 1);
- all students have a schedule that will permit Tier 2 or Tier 3; interventions/supports or enrichment opportunities in addition to the core instruction;
- all students are able to move seamlessly out and into Tiers 2 and 3 interventions/supports, as appropriate
- all students have opportunities to apply and integrate their new learning and participate in enrichment activities, when possible;
- all core instruction is provided by highly qualified content educators including general education, special education, Title I educators, English language learner educators, and support staff;
- all teachers within each grade level have common time available for planning and meetings; and
- all teachers are provided with customized professional development with job embedded supports.

Guiding Principle:
Students are not removed from core curriculum instruction to participate in Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions/supports

When designing the schedule for the year, the administrator will need to consider the unique characteristics and challenges of their school including number of students, number of grades, student characteristics and needs, professional teaching skills, teaching assignments, teacher contractual obligations, space allocation and budget. Additionally, the administrator will have to develop a system that will use achievement and performance data to schedule students to receive tiered supports when needed, and allow for the movement of students between tiers when appropriate.

Intervention/Enrichment Block

When scheduling for a tiered system of instruction it is recommended that there are dedicated intervention and/or enrichment blocks for all students. For students in need of additional supports in a targeted area, the intervention block is an opportunity to review, relearn and master the skills in that area. For students who have demonstrated proficiency in the curriculum being taught in their classrooms, the enrichment block provides an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of key concepts and to apply and integrate learning from core content. To ensure that the additional time meets the varied needs of all of the students and helps them to reach high academic standards, educators will have to develop systems to determine the appropriate interventions/supports and enrichment activities. Although, it makes scheduling even more difficult, schools should make every effort to ensure all students participate in enrichment activities.

These blocks will allow for the flexibility that is key to the success of the movement of students in and out of interventions/supports and into enrichment activities.

- **Intervention/Supports:**
 - provide for instruction for students who are struggling based upon identified (data-driven) needs;
 - primarily focus on literacy and mathematics skills; and
 - are provided by a variety of qualified personnel, including classroom teachers and special educators, Title 1 educators, English language learner educators, etc.
- **Enrichment:**
 - provides additional learning opportunities for students who demonstrate proficiency in the skills being taught in the classroom and are ready to go deeper into the content;
 - focuses on moving proficient students to advanced proficiency;
 - can be organized around enrichment units that integrate science, social studies, literacy and mathematics; and
 - is provided by a variety of qualified personnel including classroom teachers, gifted/talented coordinators/ educators, ‘specials’ educators (such as art, music, physical education), paraprofessionals and other school personnel (such as librarian, technology educators) as well as community members.

Guiding Principle:
The schedule must allow for all students to participate in supplemental supports/ intervention/enrichment periods,

Special Education Services

All services provided to students with disabilities (SWDs) through their Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be in the least restrictive environment. For some SWDs the special education services will be provided in their general education classes or during the intervention blocks. For other SWDs the special education services will be provided during the ‘Specials Block’ or other non-academic times. Schedules must be designed to promote the inclusion of SWDs in learning opportunities with their typical peers.

Starting the Process

While there are different ways to approach creating a schedule that supports a tiered system of instruction, the first step should be to determine which model will best suit your school and staff. This QRG is focused on elementary schools and highlights two scheduling models.

- **Model 1 - Re-Grouping Approach:** In this model there is an extended period of time for core curriculum instruction, typically two 90 minute blocks, one dedicated to literacy and one to mathematics. An additional block of time, typically 45 minutes, is scheduled for the provision of interventions/supports and enrichment activities. All of the classes in each grade level are combined for the intervention and enrichment blocks allowing for a more discrete grouping of students and a more varied range of enrichment opportunities. The students move to different locations around the school and receive intervention/support or enrichment services from the most qualified school personnel including their classroom teachers.
- **Model 2 - Centers Approach:** In this model there is block of time (frequently 105 – 120 minutes) in which the core curriculum instruction, intervention and enrichment services are provided within the same room. The interventions/supports and enrichment activities are provided by the most qualified personnel including the classroom teacher and other school personnel within the classroom. In Model 2 travel time to intervention/enrichment blocks is eliminated which allows for more time on learning and students are able to stay focused and are less distracted. Additionally, there are opportunities for increased coordination between the classroom and intervention/enrichment teachers because they are sharing the instructional space. This model encourages teachers to share instructional practices and allows for services for students with disabilities to be provided within the general education environment.

In some schools, it may be appropriate to use a combination of models dependent on grade, student population and staffing patterns.

Time Allocation and Staffing

The next step is to determine the length of time for:

- each learning block;
- each subject within each grade level;
- lunch and recess;
- special education and other pull-out service requirements;
- special subjects like art, music and physical education.

Tips:

- Set a schedule that is based on multiple periods of a time i.e. 30 minutes; 45 minutes, 60 minutes...
- Schedule specialists (art, music, physical education, technology...) for equal blocks of instructional time during the same daily block of time.
- Remember to consider travel time between blocks.

After these initial scheduling decisions have been made the administrator must now decide who will provide the intervention/support services and enrichment activities. The administrator should consider personnel shared between/ among buildings, such as technology educators, librarians, special service providers, para-professionals, other specialists and community members to provide enrichment activities.

Tips:

- Schedule special teachers (i.e. art, music, physical education) on a three-, four-, six-, or eight-day cycle. This may be more equitable and efficient than traditional Monday-to-Friday schedule
- Schedule academic blocks for grade levels along with individual services, starting with the scheduling requirements that are the most constraining. For example, IEP pull-out services should be scheduled first to allow for a student with a disability to participate fully in the tiered system of instruction.
- Schedule one longer recess before or after lunch time to diminish interruption and loss of instructional time

Examples

Following are examples of two scheduling models that have been developed to support a tiered system of instruction. Please note, these examples should be used by administrators as a starting point; each individual school's schedule will appear a little different.

The ESE is interested in collecting schedules from schools across the Commonwealth that reflect these scheduling patterns and the wide range of other scheduling patterns. Please consider sending your school's schedule to mtss@doe.mass.edu. Administrators who submit their schedules will be contacted by the ESE to discuss the schedule. Staff from the ESE may want to come to the school to see the schedule in action.

Example 1: This schedule reflects the **Re-Grouping Approach**. In this example there is a 90 minute block of time dedicated to ELA/Literacy and another 90 minute block of time dedicated to Mathematics. The interventions/supports and enrichment activities are provided during a 45 minutes block of time in addition to the ELA/Literacy block. All of the classes in each grade level are combined for the intervention and enrichment blocks allowing for more discrete groupings of students and a more varied range of learning opportunities. The students move to different locations around the school and receive intervention/support or enrichment services from the most qualified school personnel including their classroom teachers.

STUDENTS								
45 Minute Blocks	8:30-9:15	9:15-10:00	10:00-10:45	10:45-11:30	11:30-12:15	12:15-1:00	1:00-1:45	1:45-2:30
K	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		I/E	Recess/Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI
1	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Specials Educator Planning/Team	Lunch/Recess	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
2	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	I/E	Lunch/Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/Team
3	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials/Educator Planning/Team	Recess / Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math		I/E
4	Specials Educator Planning/Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Specials Educator Planning/Team	Lunch/Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
5	Specials Educator Planning	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Recess / Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
EDUCATORS								
Specials	Gr. 5		Gr. 1	Gr. 3	Gr. 4		K	Gr. 2
Specialists	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	K	Gr. 2		Gr. 1	As needed in classrooms or with individual/small groups of students	Gr. 3
Lunch				K, 1	2, 3, Specialists	4, 5, Specials		

Example 2: In this example of the **Re-Grouping Approach** there is a concentration on literacy skills, as three periods each day are dedicated to core ELA instruction. The intervention/enrichment period is for all content areas, as needed and is scheduled at the same time each day. This model allows for the greatest amount of flexibility in grouping students across grade levels as all staff and space are available to provide interventions or enrichment activities.

STUDENTS								
45 Minute Blocks	8:30-9:15	9:15-10:00	10:00-10:45	10:45-11:30	11:30-12:15	12:15-1:00	1:45-2:30	1:00-1:45
K	Integrated Core Instruction: ELA			Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction Math
1	Integrated Core Instruction: ELA			Recess/ Lunch	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction Math	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI
2	Integrated Core Instruction: ELA			Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Lunch/ Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI
3	Integrated Core Instruction: ELA			Integrated Core Instruction: SS/SCI	Recess / Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math	I/E	Specials Educator Planning/ Team
4	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Core Instruction: ELA			Lunch/ Recess	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction Math
5	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials Educator Planning/ Team	Core Instruction: ELA			Recess/ Lunch	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction Math
EDUCATORS								
Specials	Grade 4	Grade 5		Grade 2	Grade 1	K		Grade 3
Specialists	As needed in classrooms or with individual/small groups of students				As needed in classrooms or with individual/small groups of students			
Lunch			Specials	K, 1, Specialists	2, 3	4, 5		

Example 3: This schedule reflects the **Centers Approach** in which there is a long block of time for core ELA instruction that includes the Intervention/enrichment period. Services are provided by the most qualified personnel including the classroom teacher and other school personnel within the classroom and the model has the advantage of 1) eliminating the time for students to move to other spaces and 2) provides for the potential of greater collaboration amongst classroom teachers and specialists.

STUDENTS								
45 Minute Blocks	8:30-9:15	9:15-10:00	10:00-10:45	10:45-11:30	11:30-12:15	12:15-1:00	1:00-1:45	1:45-2:30
K	Integrated Core Instruction - ELA		I/E	Lunch/Recess	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI
1	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		Recess/Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials Educator Planning/Team	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
2	Specials Educator Planning/Team	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		I/E	Integrated Core Instruction SCI	Recess/Lunch	Integrated Core Instruction Math	
3	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Integrated Core Instruction: ELA		I/E	Lunch/Recess	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Specials Educator Planning/Team
4	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Integrated Core Instruction - Math		Specials Educator Planning/Team	Lunch/Recess	Integrated Core Instruction ELA		I/E
5	Integrated Core Instruction Math		Specials Educator Planning/Team	Integrated Core Instruction SS/SCI	Recess/Lunch	I/E	Integrated Core Instruction ELA	
EDUCATORS								
Specials	Gr. 2		Gr. 5	Gr. 4		Gr. 1	K	Gr. 3
Specialists	Gr. 1		K	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 5		Gr. 4
Content Educators	Planning Gr. 2		Planning Gr. 5	Planning Gr. 4		Planning Gr. 1	Planning Gr. K	Planning Gr. 3
Lunch				K, 1	4, 5, Specialists	2, 3	Specialists	

Notes

- In Examples 1 & 3 both ELA and Math have two periods of Core Instruction. The additional period provides time for intervention/enrichment in either of the content areas.
- In Example 2, there is a strong commitment to ELA; it is an extended block of three periods. There is a potential for intervention/enrichment to be embedded in this block of time and to then dedicate the additional intervention/enrichment period for Math. Note that the intervention/enrichment period is adjacent to all of the Math classes.
- In Example 3, the intervention/enrichment period is adjacent to the ELA class and is predetermined to provide intervention/ enrichment for ELA. Core Math instruction is scheduled for 90 minutes. There is no discretionary intervention/enrichment period.

The decision on how to best schedule students and school personnel is based upon the unique characteristics of each school including numbers of students, demographics, personnel, grade levels, and space, and will need to be revisited each year. Using outcome and performance data when designing the schedule will help to ensure that all students have quality learning time whether they are struggling or have already mastered the content. Using real-time assessments, data analysis, and progress monitoring will provide the data needed to ensure that students have the flexibility to move in and out of the intervention group, as appropriate.

Finally, the key to the success of a well-designed schedule is the commitment from all of the school personnel to use the instructional and intervention/enrichment time to the fullest benefit of the students.

Sources and Resources

Elizabeth Crawford and Joseph Torgesen, [*Teaching All Students to Read: Practices from Reading First Schools Reading First With Strong Intervention Outcomes*](#), Florida Center for Reading Research. Florida State University (2007)

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[*RTI Scheduling Considerations Checklist Elementary Level*](#): West Virginia Department of Education (2009)

[*Scheduling RTI and Special Services in Elementary Schools: No More "When can I have your kids?"*](#): Michael D. Rettig, Professor Emeritus, James Madison University (2009)

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