

# ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING GUIDE



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this instructional planning guide is to help elementary school principals and their teams **create school schedules that meet the learning needs of every student in their building.**

The guide highlights priorities, decision points, tools, and models that school leaders can use when building school schedules. It also elevates considerations for the time and resource tradeoffs necessary for implementation. Each decision point section provides actionable steps for managing scheduling considerations that leaders of all types of schools face.

## WHY IS SCHEDULING IMPORTANT?

All students deserve the time and space to learn across all content areas—but not every schedule affords students the same opportunities.

Scheduling sets students up for success in early learning and literacy, which is indicative of long-term achievement in high school, postsecondary education, and future careers. Research shows that students who aren't proficient in reading by third grade, for example, are four times more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>i</sup>

Leaders need strategies for filling gaps in student achievement and unmet individualized learning needs. They can effectively incorporate these strategies into their daily schedule when they approach them with intentionality

Strong elementary school schedules enable teachers to implement effective pedagogical building blocks, including grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and high expectations, proven to increase inclusion and opportunity for all students.<sup>ii</sup>



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# CONTEXT

A schedule is the heartbeat of a school. It reflects a school's values and sets the priorities for what students and teachers should care about. And when designed strategically, a school's schedule enables empowering student and teacher experiences that lead to improved student outcomes. In short, it's a central element to a high-functioning school system.

[Building strategic schedules](#) shouldn't feel like an isolated process. Rather, at its best, strategic scheduling is a process that happens at the school level with coordinated support from district and state leaders. In fact, state education agencies, school districts, and school leaders all play critical roles in developing strategic school schedules:

- **State education agencies** are charged with creating the necessary enabling conditions to ensure students thrive, including:
  - Providing schools and districts with clear guidance on how to implement state statutes.
  - Creating strong academic standards that ensure students are equipped with requisite skills for success in the post-secondary path of their choosing.
  - Establish standards for seat time, class sizes, or teacher certification requirements, as needed.

- **School districts** provide direct support and coaching to school leaders; provide high-quality curriculum and instructional materials; and deploy the right staffing combinations to facilitate schedule implementation.
- **School leaders** can build schedules that are right for their individual contexts, students' needs, and staff expertise.

An effective, strategic schedule supported by leaders at all levels outlines how schools will allocate their time and resources. It should be guided by students' academic and social-emotional needs and provide opportunities for educators to collaborate and grow. And it requires tough tradeoffs—with school leaders making deliberate decisions on how various staffing and scheduling decisions will impact students with the highest needs to ensure that all students get the right combination of resources to thrive.

This scheduling guide can serve as a roadmap for principals and teams who want to take a resource equity approach to scheduling, as it outlines how leaders can design schedules for differentiated instructional time and attention, opportunities for social-emotional learning, and time for teacher collaboration and professional development.

## FOUR SCHEDULING PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING

### PRIORITY 1

Anchor schedules around effective, curriculum-informed Tier 1 instruction.

### PRIORITY 2

Differentiate instructional time and attention according to student need.

### PRIORITY 3

Embed opportunities for social-emotional learning.

### PRIORITY 4

Create structures for teacher collaboration and professional learning.

# PRIORITY 1

## Anchor Schedules Around Effective, Curriculum-Informed Tier 1 Instruction

Tier 1 instruction that gives all students access to grade-level content should be the foundation for each school day. Leaders can strategically fit a sufficient amount of equitable Tier 1 time across content areas within limited hours by focusing on being flexible to student needs and iterating wherever possible.

To ensure they successfully incorporate Tier 1 instruction into their schedules, principals and their teams should address the following **three** decision points.

### DECISION POINT 1

## Determine Instructional Minutes Across Subject Areas

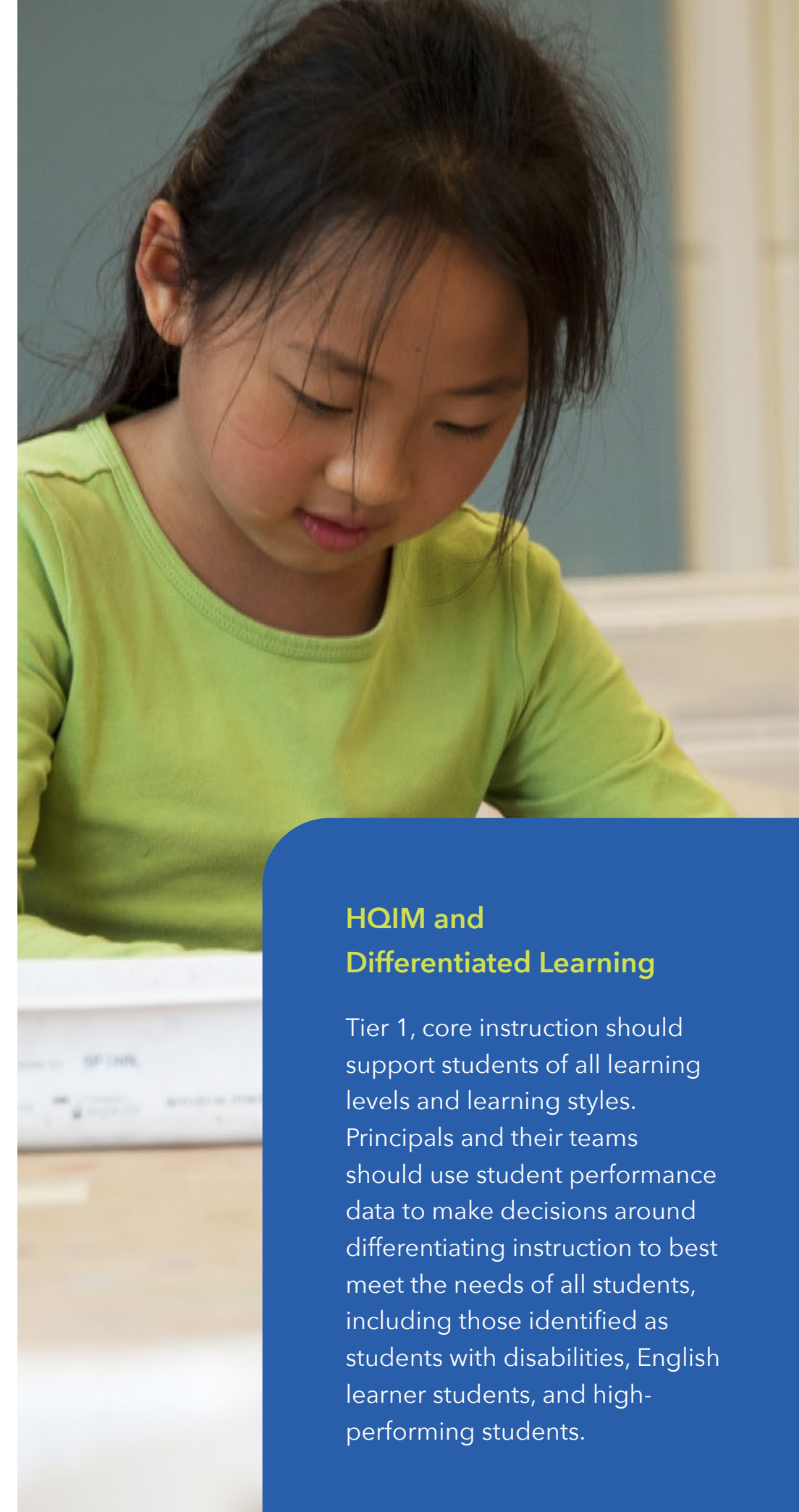
Leaders should be empowered to make scheduling decisions that make the best use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), meet students' learning needs, and support teachers in their buildings.

To best support students and teachers, strategic schedulers should:

**1. Build schedules that align with their curriculum.** Most HQIM providers include sample schedules and instructional minute recommendations to help leaders provide sufficient time for educators to implement the scope and sequence for their content, grade, or grade band. Principals and their

teams can use the guidance provided—particularly for early literacy—to align on the minimum amount of time educators should spend in direct phonics, reading, and writing instruction.

- 2. Account for state and local context.** State legislations may recommend or require that students' schedules include specific amounts of time dedicated to particular content areas. Ideally, these requirements will align with the practices outlined in a school's chosen HQIM.
- 3. Provide flexibility to respond appropriately to student learning needs and goals.** Even if they have guidance from their curricula, school leaders should consider building flexibility into their schedules to enable educators to meet their students' needs, such as spending more time on a skill or creating opportunities for small groupings within and across classrooms to reinforce skills. For more on differentiating instructional time, see [Priority 2](#).
- 4. Balance instructional and non-academic time to foster relationship-building and other social-emotional supports throughout the school day.** Principals and their teams can help teachers determine sufficient time—aligned with the school's strategic priorities—for fostering student-student and student-teacher relationships. For an in-depth discussion on developing social-emotional learning in the school day, see [Priority 4](#).



### HQIM and Differentiated Learning

Tier 1, core instruction should support students of all learning levels and learning styles. Principals and their teams should use student performance data to make decisions around differentiating instruction to best meet the needs of all students, including those identified as students with disabilities, English learner students, and high-performing students.

## DECISION POINT 2

### Determine How and When to Schedule Instructional Blocks Throughout the School Day

While schedules should reflect student need, some schedules might be constrained by space and personnel limitations. As principals and their teams approach schedule design, they should consider the following to help streamline the scheduling process and deliver content equitably.

- 1. Schedule long blocks of instruction where they're most needed.** Long blocks are especially important in early-grades literacy instruction to integrate opportunities for skill reinforcement and intervention within Tier 1 time. They can also enable project-based learning or interdisciplinary learning that can promote more integrated and engaging opportunities for students.
- 2. Increase opportunities for small, flexible groupings.** Schedulers should consider which courses can occur simultaneously throughout the day to enable opportunities to group across homerooms. To decrease group size, they can place teachers in classrooms for push-in support. For more on this, see [Priority 2](#).
- 3. Schedule long blocks for teacher collaboration.** Providing sufficient time for grade-level or content-based teams to collaborate requires leaders to find coverage in ways that enable all teachers in a grade or content area to be free simultaneously.
- 4. Balance logistical constraints with strategic priorities.** To enhance students' learning and development, leaders should balance their strategic goals with constraints such as time, room capacity, and shared staff across grades and buildings.



**In schools with schedules that rotate on a daily or weekly basis, schedulers should focus on:**

**Maximizing predictability.** Principals can minimize the impact of a rotating schedule on the student experience by keeping other variables constant, such as ensuring daily schedules look the same week over week.

**The impact on other rotations or services.** Varying schedules often makes it easier to coordinate different staff that are working across multiple schools.

## DECISION POINT 3

# Determine Appropriate Staffing for Effective Instruction

The way leaders organize and assign staff within the instructional day will significantly impact the teacher and student experience.

As such, school leaders should reflect on the following questions when considering staff roles and assignments:

### 1. How should I assign educators to maximize their instructional and content expertise?

To maximize expertise, leaders should consider balancing content knowledge across teaching teams and leveraging teacher leaders or other instructional experts where possible, specifically in areas where content expertise is needed, such as third-grade literacy.

Assigning educators based on instructional and content expertise may prompt decisions about whether to assign teachers by content area (e.g. departmentalization) or by homeroom.

To investigate the differences between homeroom-based and departmentalized models of elementary instruction, and learn more about tradeoffs, see Appendix A.

### 2. How should I assign educators and support staff to provide individualized and targeted attention for all students?

Schools can use a variety of models to differentiate time and attention for students—with both Tier 1 instruction and additional supports. See [Priority 2](#) for more on additional intervention and support structures.

[Opportunity Culture's](#) multi-classroom leader model highlights how varying class sizes can help extend the impact of highly effective teachers. This strategy allows newer teachers, for example, to work with a smaller group of students in their first year(s) as they build their instructional and management skills.

School leaders can also find opportunities for non-classroom staff—such as a floating reading specialist, paraeducator, tutor, special education teacher, or English language teacher—to provide push-in support throughout the day to decrease class size.

Team-based teaching models can create differentiated and individualized learning experiences for students and more meaningful and integrated collaboration structures for teachers. In a [co-teaching model](#), for example, educators can flex instructional models throughout the day to create small-group and even one-on-one time in the classroom. For more on this strategy, see Arizona State University's [Next Generation Workforce Models](#), which use team-based teaching to address existing teacher vacancies, expand the role of educators, enable more collaboration, and create more individualization for students.

### 3. How should I assign educators and support staff to enable meaningful, job-embedded professional learning and collaboration?

Professional development and collaboration opportunities should meet teachers' and students' day-to-day needs. They should enable teachers who share content or students to work together to plan, adjust instruction, and respond quickly and flexibly to students' needs. For an in-depth discussion of why and how different teachers should collaborate, see [Priority 4](#).

Schedulers should consider:

- Enabling educators of the same grade or content level to collaborate in a long block (ideally 90 minutes or more) at least once per week.
- Providing new teachers with the structures they need to develop in a supportive environment, such as a reduced teaching load, opportunities to co-teach with an experienced educator, or more frequent observations.
- Finding opportunities for educators and staff to work in teams to reduce isolation and increase on-the-job training and support.
- Leveraging and expanding the impact of the most effective and highly skilled educators, while providing meaningful growth and differentiated compensation opportunities.

For more details on how leaders can implement strategic shifts and team-based models to increase professional learning and collaboration opportunities, see ERS' ["A Vision for a Reimagined Teaching Job."](#)



# PRIORITY 2

## Differentiate Instructional Time and Attention According to Student Need

Students don't learn at the same pace or in the same ways, nor do they have the same social-emotional needs. To meet students' individual needs and provide the right scaffolds to enable students for success, elementary schedules should differentiate time and attention within the Tier 1 setting.

### DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORTS CAN:

- **Reinforce grade-level instruction** by enabling teachers to focus on specific student skill or content gaps.
- **Provide Tier 2 or 3 supports for students who need it.** These Tier 2 or 3 supports – often provided by homeroom teachers or specialized educators in individualized settings – can be academic or non-academic.
- **Provide enrichment opportunities,** led by specials teachers, community partners, or other educators, to enhance learning beyond core instruction.
- **Support high-performing students** by providing time for enhanced grade-level instruction or enrichment.
- **Support heterogeneous, inclusive learning environments,** which can be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities and English language learner students who might otherwise miss opportunities to engage in the general education environment with their peers.



## DECISION POINT 1

### Identify Opportunities—and a Format—for Dedicated Intervention and Enrichment Time

Dedicating time for intervention and enrichment—either as small-group or individualized instruction—allows school leaders to respond to students’ needs in targeted and flexible ways. In general, student groupings should:

- **Align to teachers’ skill sets and students’ needs.** For example, if one teacher in an intervention model is dual-certified in English learning, English learner students would be best served in that teacher’s small group time.
- **Be flexible, based on data, and revisited on a recurring basis.** Principals and teachers should monitor progress frequently using the tools available to them in their HQIM. Central office data analysts can help principals direct teachers to the most relevant ways of targeting and improving intervention.

There are two primary scheduling options that school leaders should consider when creating this time: lateral intervention and vertical intervention. To determine which structure best suits their school, principals and their teams should first assess their available resources, their school’s size, and the number of homerooms in each grade level.

## LATERAL INTERVENTION

Lateral intervention is when intervention blocks occur simultaneously within a grade. Principals can support teachers by redistributing students across homerooms as needed.

### Second-Grade Schedule

	HOMEROOM A	HOMEROOM B	HOMEROOM C
09:00-10:00	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts
10:00-11:00	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention

#### Key Benefits and Considerations:

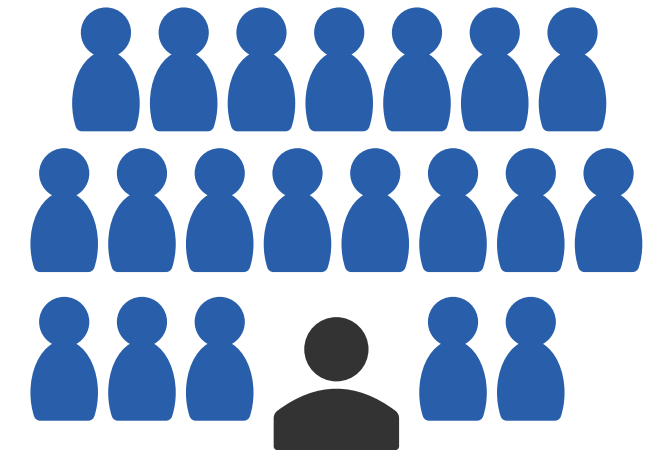
- Allows for more flexible groupings within each grade level or across grade levels. See [Example 3 in Priorities in Action](#) for a full intervention schedule.
- Enables academic interventionists to provide small-group services to students in multiple homerooms, which may allow for more effective groupings.
- Allows interventionists to support more grade levels. The interventionist can support a second-grade block at 10:00 a.m., for example, and a third-grade block at 1:00 p.m.

# GROUPING LATERAL INTERVENTION ACROSS HOMEROOMS

Student-teacher ratios in second-grade homerooms during Tier 1 time might look like this:

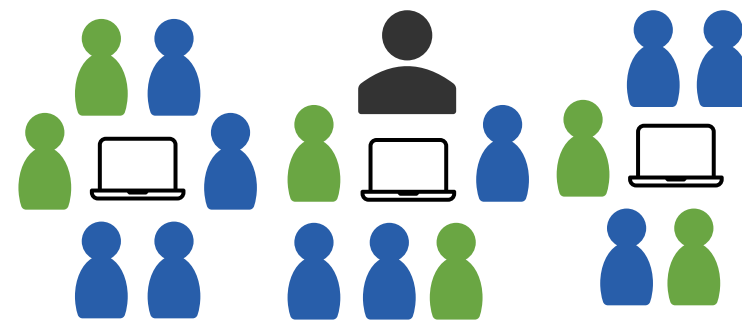


18 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom A

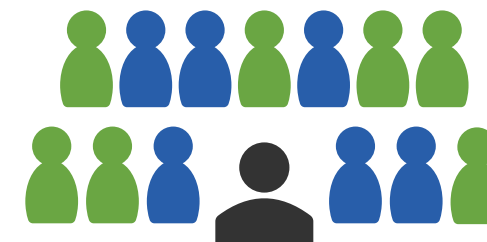


20 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom B

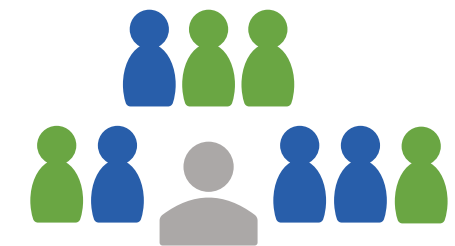
Lateral intervention and enrichment supported by a dedicated interventionist across two second-grade classrooms could look like this:



17 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom B



13 Students : 1 Teacher  
Sharing Homeroom A



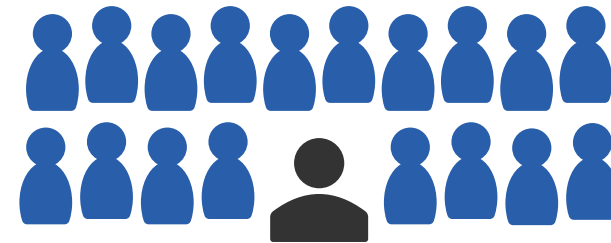
8 Students : 1 Interventionist  
Sharing Homeroom A

## ENRICHMENT

Interventionists can provide supplementary grade-level instruction, below-grade-level remediation, instruction for students with disabilities, instruction for English language learners, and lessons for high-performing students. As interventionists provide targeted Tier 2 support, other students can work independently to progress on their learning goals, reinforcing Tier 1 content.

# GROUPING LATERAL INTERVENTION ACROSS HOMEROOMS

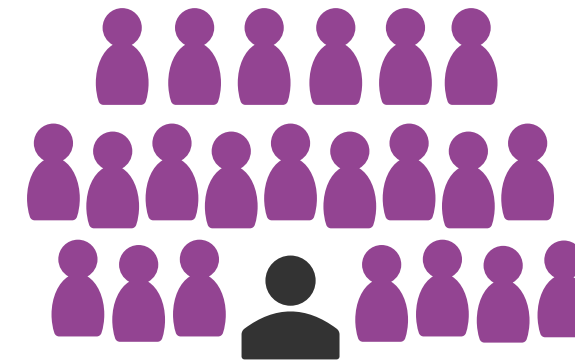
In a larger school with three homerooms within a grade, Tier 1 time might look like this:



18 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom A

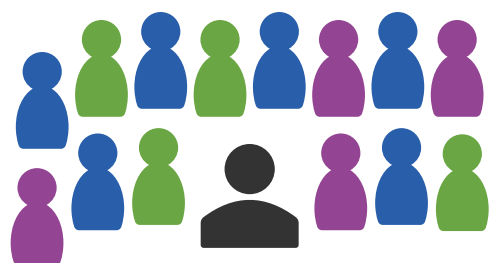


20 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom B



22 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom C

Targeted intervention and enrichment with one academic interventionist and one additional support staff might look like this:



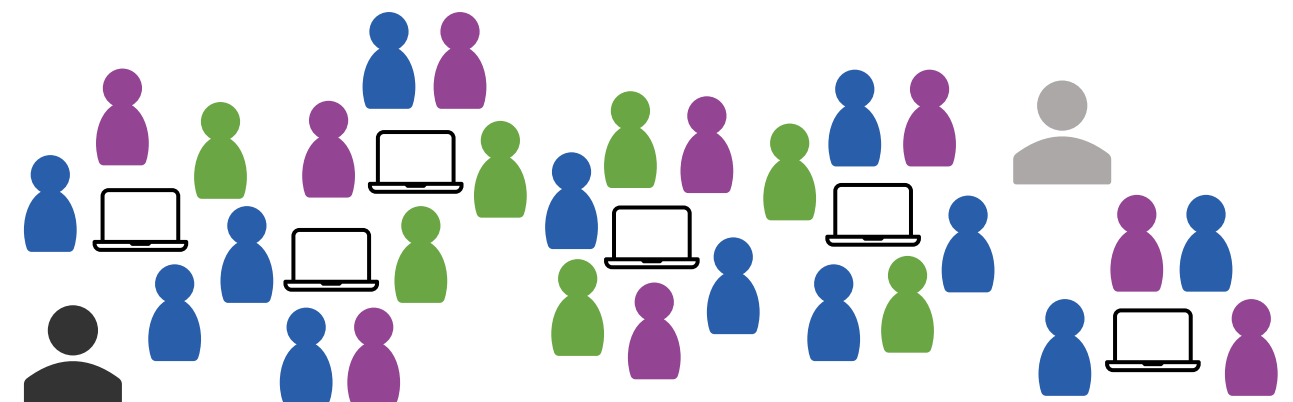
14 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom A



11 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom B



7 Students : 1 Interventionist  
Homeroom C



28 Students : 1 Teacher & 1 Support Staff  
Computer Multi-Purpose Space

## VERTICAL INTERVENTION

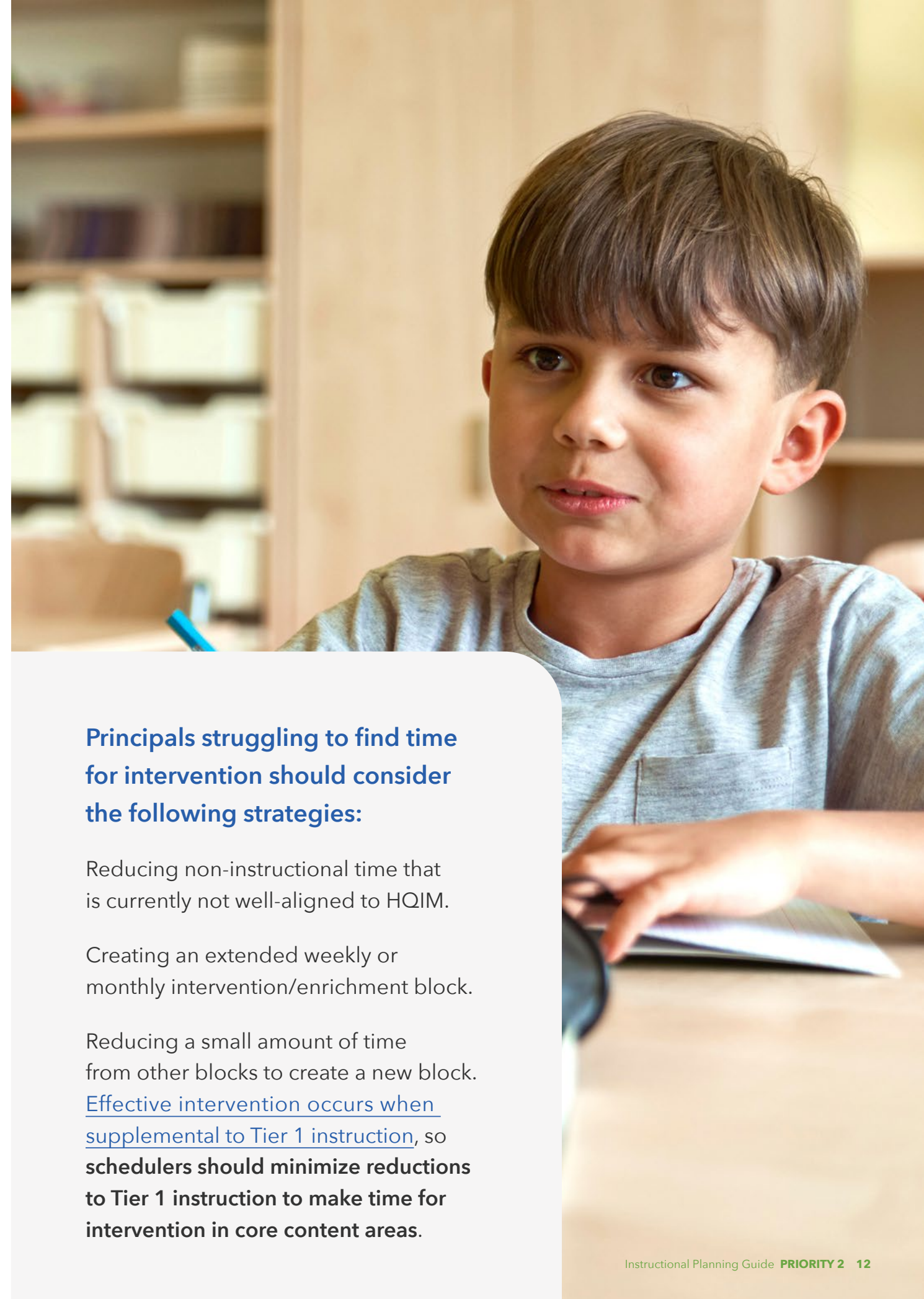
Vertical intervention is when intervention blocks are staggered across a grade level. Principals can help teachers develop their daily schedules, while interventionists support multiple homerooms across a grade or grade band.

### Second-Grade Schedule

	HOMEROOM A	HOMEROOM B	HOMEROOM C
09:00-10:00	Intervention	Language Arts	Language Arts
10:00-11:00	Math	Intervention	Math
11:00-12:00	Language Arts	Math	Intervention

#### Key Benefits and Considerations:

- Allows for varying student group sizes, depending on the number of interventionists and the number of students in a homeroom.
- Enables one academic interventionist to support multiple homerooms at different times.
- Decreases opportunities for grouping flexibly within a grade.
- Requires leaders to deliberately preserve daily planning time for interventionists.
- Groupings comprise students from the same homeroom, so by pushing into one classroom at a time, intervention groups often become smaller. In some cases, particular students might benefit from being grouped with students from other homerooms.



#### Principals struggling to find time for intervention should consider the following strategies:

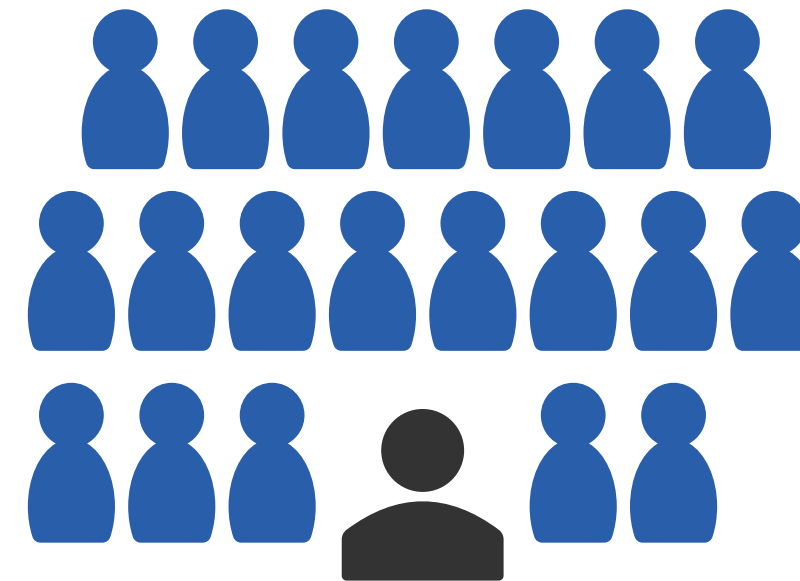
Reducing non-instructional time that is currently not well-aligned to HQIM.

Creating an extended weekly or monthly intervention/enrichment block.

Reducing a small amount of time from other blocks to create a new block. [Effective intervention occurs when supplemental to Tier 1 instruction](#), so **schedulers should minimize reductions to Tier 1 instruction to make time for intervention in core content areas.**

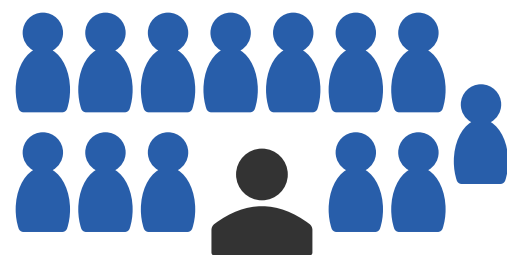
# GROUPING VERTICAL INTERVENTION ACROSS HOMEROOMS

A second-grade homeroom during Tier 1 time might look like this:

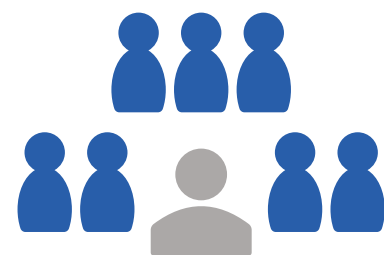


20 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom A

Vertical intervention supported by an academic interventionist pushing into a second-grade homeroom might look like this:

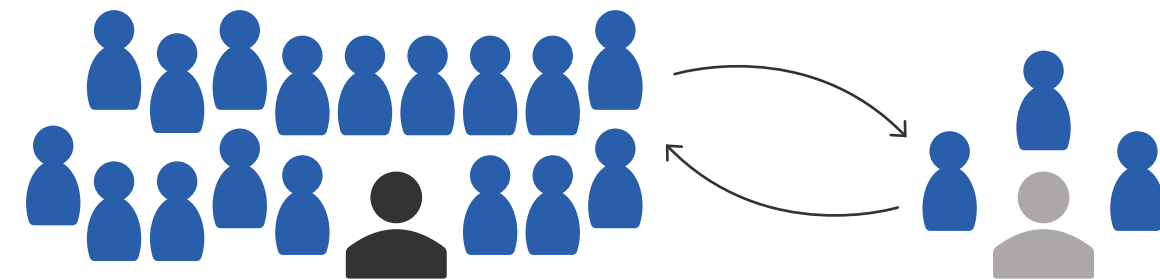


13 Students : 1 Teacher  
Homeroom A



7 Students : 1 Interventionist  
Homeroom A

or



17 Students : 1 Teacher  
17 students work independently  
supported by 1 teacher

3 Students : 1 Interventionist  
3 students rotate through support  
from interventionist

## DECISION POINT 2

### Explore Inclusion Models That Support Students With Disabilities and English Language Learners

All students deserve a high-quality education that prepares them for future success. Creating heterogeneous learning environments—with students of different backgrounds and with varying needs—can improve outcomes for all students.

One key mechanism for fostering these learning environments in elementary school is the inclusion-based model. This model enables students with disabilities and English learner students to receive their primary Tier 1 instruction in the general education setting for most or all of the day, supported by both general education and specialized educators.

#### Benefits of Inclusive Schedule Design

FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS	FOR CLASSROOM PEERS	FOR THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY
Access to grade-level content.	Additional staff in these classes enables smaller group sizes.	Helps solve challenges caused by special education teacher shortages.
Greater academic achievement through instruction led by multiple teachers.	Differentiated instruction meets all students' needs.	Special education teachers can serve in more consultative roles and support more students and teachers.
Social interaction with all their peers.	<a href="#">Develop greater understanding and acceptance of individuals' differences and diversity.</a> <sup>v</sup>	Educators share responsibility of supporting students with disabilities, distributing the load often placed on special education teachers.



## DECISION POINT 3

### Assign Staff and Leverage Technology Flexibly

Differentiating supports for students requires school leaders to rethink how they assign staff and leverage technology to create flexible groupings and maximize educators' impact.

To make staffing decisions that support intervention, enrichment, and inclusive classroom models, leaders should consider these strategies:

#### 1. Incentivize dual certification to create more flexible instruction models.

Principals can provide stipends or one-time funding to encourage teachers to obtain additional endorsements and certifications for teaching students with disabilities or English learner students. Having more dual-certified educators can create flexibility, address vacancies in critical areas, and create a knowledge base around serving students with additional learning needs.

Many [inclusion-based co-teaching models](#) rely on dual certification to ensure that students receive the required service minutes in their individualized educational plan (IEP), while maximizing their time in the general education setting.

#### 2. Utilize existing educators and staff in flexible ways.

School leaders can significantly reduce group sizes for targeted moments of the day by using existing

interventionists or support staff—such as teacher assistants, paraprofessionals, reading specialists, or instructional coaches—as floating push-in supports.

Non-instructional staff—such as counselors, social workers, administrators, and clerical staff—can play a role as well. They can supervise students during independent or computer-based instruction; serve as mentors or advisors in social-emotional learning groups; or provide enrichment to groups of students to enable instructional staff to focus on targeted academic intervention.

Special education and English language teachers can also serve as instructional supports during dedicated intervention or enrichment time. They can create small groups of students—including those with and without IEPs—working on similar skills or gaps

#### 3. Create dedicated push-in roles to support during targeted moments of the day.

Reassigning or hiring dedicated interventionists or support staff can help create targeted moments of push-in support during both Tier 1 and dedicated intervention and enrichment time. Leaders can assign these roles within or across grade levels in both academic and non-academic settings.

School leaders may also consider hiring retired teachers, other certified staff, or community partners—such as AmeriCorps participants, parents, college students, or staff from the YMCA—for part-time supports throughout the day.

#### 4. Leverage technology to supplement Tier 1 instruction.

Curriculum-aligned materials and technology enable students to access individualized learning opportunities and teachers to create small, targeted groups to support students' needs.

It's critical, however, that technological tools align with Tier 1 curriculum and that students use them to support specific skill and content development. Content that doesn't align with Tier 1 instruction—such as stock learning applications—don't properly support personalized learning needs.





**Research has shown that integrating SEL into the school day results in a range of benefits:**

**Academic benefits for all students:** A meta-analysis found “significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement.”<sup>vii</sup>

**Long-term benefits to the broader community:** “A benefit-cost analysis of prominent SEL interventions revealed a positive return on investment averaging a yield of \$11 in long-term benefits over a range of outcomes for every \$1 invested.”<sup>vii</sup>

# PRIORITY 3

## Embed Opportunities for Social-Emotional Learning

**Providing an environment that promotes social, emotional, and cognitive development is one of a school’s core functions, and it’s especially important for youth who have experienced trauma or adversity.**

Classroom environments that prioritize social-emotional development increase students’ sense of belonging and strengthen their connections to their learning. School leaders and teachers can foster social, emotional, and academic development by creating positive, safe, and relationships-based environments.

Another outcome of social-emotional learning (SEL) structures is that students develop meaningful relationships with each other and with their instructors. With increased youth mental health challenges and trauma, school leaders have a responsibility to support their students’ social-emotional learning and development now more than ever.





School leaders and teachers can provide tiered layers of SEL supports based on student need. Tiers 1, 2, and 3 instruction can offer varying levels of SEL supports, from foundational prioritization to intensive intervention. The following decision points focus on integrating Tier 1 supports into the elementary schedule.

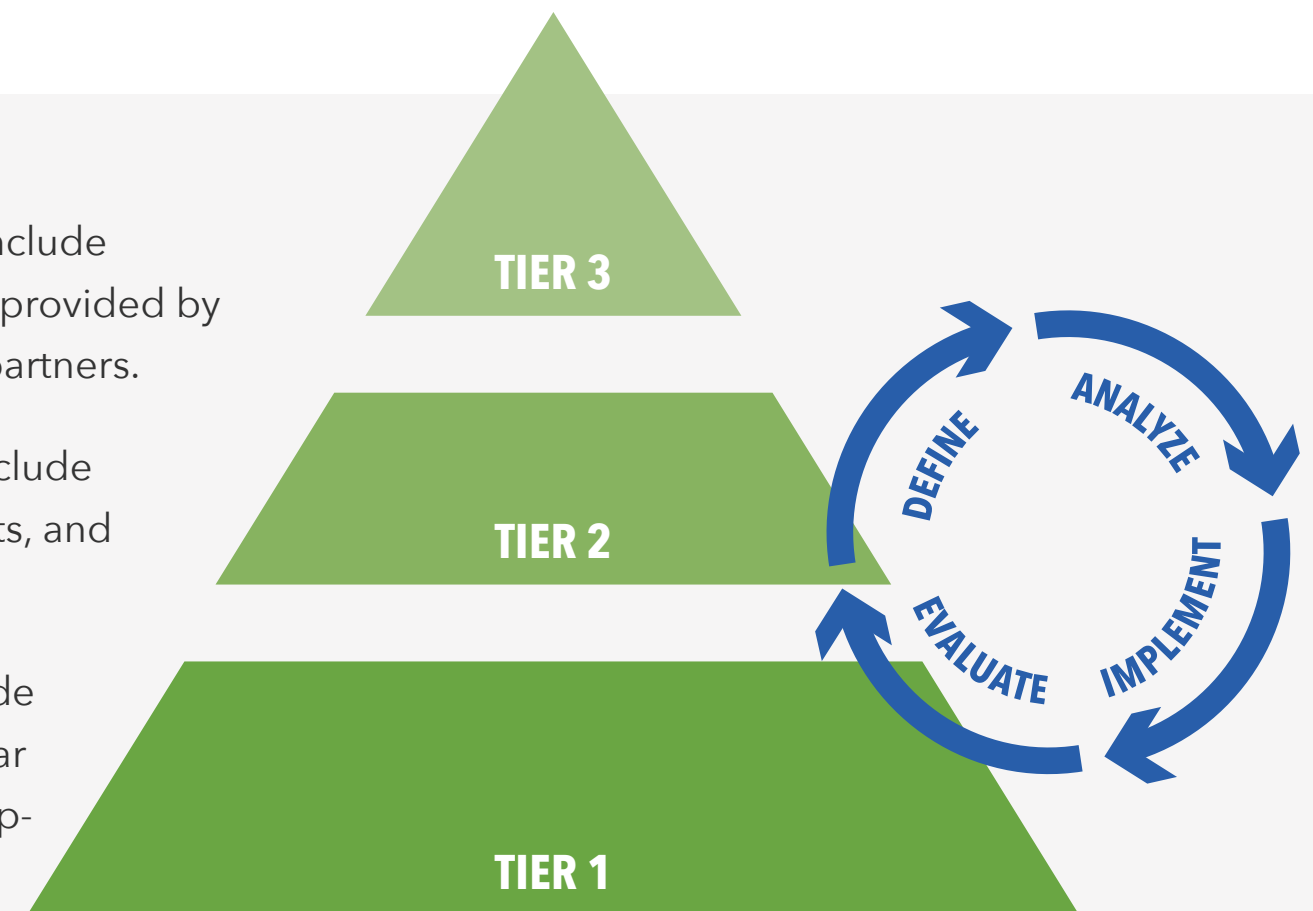
Creating time for social-emotional learning and development may feel like another important element to fit into an already-packed elementary school schedule. Principals and their teams can prioritize effectively by breaking down the decisions about:

- Incorporating SEL into lessons across core subjects.
- Creating dedicated SEL time in the schedule.
- Providing the instructional support needed for successful implementation.

**Tier 3 intensive interventions** include sustained 1:1 counseling services, provided by on-staff counselors or community partners.

**Tier 2 supplemental services** include family outreach, behavioral supports, and counseling support groups.

**Tier 1 universal structures** include SEL instruction and practice, regular family engagement, and relationship-building structures.



## DECISION POINT 1

### Identify Opportunities to Incorporate SEL Instruction Into the Core Curriculum

Educators can enhance students' learning and development by incorporating SEL skills into academic content standards. Leaders should consider the implications for selecting the right curriculum and providing teachers with sufficient professional learning opportunities.

#### Curriculum

Principals and their teams may choose to acquire a new SEL-embedded curriculum or supplement current curricula with a high-quality SEL curriculum. Integrating SEL into high-quality curricular lessons should ensure that students have regular time to collaborate, advocate, resolve conflicts, debate multiple perspectives, and solve grade-level problems with peers.

#### Professional Learning

To support the implementation of high-quality SEL curriculum throughout the school day, schools should ensure qualified school- or district-level staff have time to learn and integrate SEL lessons into their curriculum. Prioritizing time for effective professional learning ensures that:

- Teachers can access an SEL curriculum that allows time for building SEL skills throughout core academic content blocks.
- Teachers are encouraged to promote relationship-building and SEL skill development throughout core subjects, creating a welcoming space for students to learn.
- Teachers are willing and able to pause instruction when necessary to lean into an SEL learning moment.
- School leaders can work with teachers to create common principles and language to consistently communicate SEL goals to students.
- Teachers have access to instructional coaches and SEL leaders to discuss SEL integration.

A curriculum-integrated SEL approach can help eliminate time constraints within a blocked elementary school schedule. If SEL lessons aren't embedded effectively into content standards, however, teachers can struggle to include SEL instruction across subject areas. It's important for school and classroom leaders to prioritize SEL, even as constraints arise.



## DECISION POINT 2

### Identify Additional Opportunities to Embed SEL Instruction Throughout the School Day

In addition to including SEL in core instruction, schools can employ a variety of strategies for dedicating time to teach explicit social-emotional learning skills.

The frequency and format of SEL-focused blocks can vary, depending on the skills being taught, the amount of instructional time available for SEL skills, and the students' needs. School leaders need to balance these priorities to make the best use of students' and teachers' time.

Some common scheduling structures for SEL time include:

- **Morning meeting and closing circles.** Educators can take 10-15 minutes at the beginning or end of the day to introduce mini-lessons and debrief learnings on an ongoing basis. These mini-lessons create touch points for students and teachers, which can be particularly beneficial for schools using departmentalized staffing models.
- **Dedicated SEL blocks.** Scheduling a dedicated daily, weekly, or rotating SEL block can create opportunities for introducing lessons and practicing skills. Students benefit from a clear separation of their core academic subjects and SEL lessons.
- **SEL-focused intervention or enrichment blocks.** Incorporating SEL lessons into the rotation of intervention or enrichment blocks can allow for more flexible small groups of students who need targeted SEL supports.



### DECISION POINT 3

## Establish School Norms and Staffing Assignments to Support SEL Instruction

In most elementary schools, homeroom teachers are the primary adults supporting students’ social-emotional learning each day. But when schools embed SEL into core instruction, other staff—such as specials teachers, English language teachers, counselors, social workers, and behavioral specialists—play important roles, as well.

Non-homeroom staff can reinforce SEL skills in their interactions with students, push into homeroom-based instruction, and provide Tier 2 and 3 SEL interventions to students who require additional support.

It’s also important to consider the collaboration and professional learning structures that educators need to deliver effective and equitable SEL instruction. Counselors, social workers, and other SEL experts play a particularly critical role in developing other educators’ skills and competencies by providing ongoing, job-embedded professional learning focused on effective and equitable SEL instruction.

### School Leaders Should Consider Three Goals for Fostering Educator Collaboration

GOAL	PARTICIPANTS	ACTIONS
<b>Creating SEL-specific collaboration to help teachers align on SEL curricula and practices.</b>	Leaders provide expert support to <b>grade-level teaching teams</b> on teaching SEL.	Provide staff with <b>regular collaborative time</b> to plan instruction that is responsive to student needs. <a href="#">See more in Priority 4, Decision Point 3</a>  Provide time supported by expert coaches, or mentor teachers. <a href="#">See more in Priority 4, Decision Point 2</a>  Learn more about SEL-specific collaboration in the <a href="#">Positive and Inviting School Climate toolkit</a> .
<b>Creating student-specific collaboration time for teachers to align on student supports.</b>	<b>Shared-student teaching teams</b> coordinate on the layered supports students need.	Preserve time (potentially outside the school day) to review students’ social-emotional development goals and milestones during shared-student planning time. <a href="#">See more in Priority 4, Decision Point 3</a>
<b>Providing ongoing, job-embedded professional development.</b>	<b>School leaders</b> provide teachers with SEL resources and grade-level lesson plan ideas to help develop integrated SEL learning practices.  <b>Leaders and educators</b> implement culturally sustaining and age-appropriate practices and address biases that impact students’ SEL growth.	Utilize SEL leadership to define the professional development curriculum that staff can use to enhance their SEL instructional skills.

Supporting students’ varied social-emotional needs can be challenging for teachers. To mitigate these challenges, school leaders should find opportunities to vary teachers’ workloads and responsibilities. When students have social-emotional needs that extend beyond the scope of a classroom teacher, leaders can partner with supplementary programs and support groups for specialized support.



## WHAT IS CONNECTED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

Connected professional learning involves tight connections between rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments; content-focused, expert-led collaboration; and frequent, growth-oriented feedback.

# PRIORITY 4

## Create Structures for Teacher Collaboration, Planning, and Job-Embedded Professional Learning

A strategically designed schedule optimizes the student and teacher experiences. To improve these experiences, leaders should organize staffing and teacher schedules around opportunities for planning and connected professional learning. In addition to improving educators' experiences, thoughtfully embedded collaboration and professional learning time is critical for implementing high-quality Tier 1 instruction and enabling students to access grade-level content.

Teachers' schedules should promote a collaborative teaching job comprising teams of educators with sustainable workloads who are supported by instructional experts.

Like student needs, though, teachers' professional learning needs aren't one-size-fits-all. Leaders should organize opportunities for connected professional learning around educators' unique needs. As part of this scheduling decision-making process, principals and their teams should determine how staff are assigned to teams, how those teams collaborate, and who supports those teams.

## DECISION POINT 1

### Determine Collaboration and Professional Learning Structures

Collaboration and professional learning can transform the traditionally isolated nature of the teaching job. When led by expert teachers, strategic teaching teams can lower individual workloads and give students more robust teaching styles.

After school leaders and teachers identify their teaching teams and collaboration structures, they should turn their attention to addressing the scheduling implications for integrating these structures into the school day.

To increase the impact on the student experience, teacher planning, coaching, and collaboration should be flexible and responsive to teacher needs. Novice teachers, for example, might require additional independent planning time and more frequent coaching as they develop content and teaching experience. Similarly, teacher leaders might need increased individual planning time to plan for leading grade-level teams or coaching conversations.

When setting aside time for teacher planning, collaboration, and support, schedulers should consider the following functions and time goals:

PARTICIPANTS	COLLABORATION GOAL	RECOMMENDED FREQUENCY
<b>INDIVIDUAL PLANNING AND COACHING</b>		
<b>Individual teachers</b>	Time embedded into the school day and before or after school time for independent planning, reflection, and one-on-one check-ins.	45-60 minutes per day, in accordance with local bargaining and based on teachers' experience levels, roles, and responsibilities.
<b>Coach-coachee pairs</b>	Opportunities to provide regular, growth-oriented feedback from expert teachers or content experts.	Weekly or biweekly, based on teachers' experiences, roles, and responsibilities.
<b>COLLABORATIVE PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES</b>		
<b>All staff</b>	Opportunity to discuss school- or districtwide updates and provide training or professional learning.	Biweekly or monthly
<b>Shared-content and/or grade-level teams</b>	Time embedded into the school day, led by instructional experts or expert teachers and focused on improving instruction. This time should include English learner and special education teachers. <a href="#">Learn more about expert-led learning in Priority 4, Decision Point 3.</a>	90 minutes per week
<b>Shared-student teams</b>	Time to align learning goals for particular students and review student data.	Biweekly or monthly
<b>Vertical teaching teams</b>	Time to explore how standards, materials, assessment, and instruction align within content areas across grade levels.	Monthly or quarterly

This sample schedule embeds different professional learning and collaboration opportunities:

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
ARRIVAL	ARRIVAL	ARRIVAL	ARRIVAL	ARRIVAL
Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
Teach	Collaboration Grade-Level Team 90+ minutes	Teach	Teach	Teach
Planning Period 50-60 minutes		Planning Period 50-60 minutes	Planning Period 50-60 minutes	Planning Period 50-60 minutes
Teach	Teach	Teach	Teach	Teach
LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
Teach	Teach	Teach	Teach	Teach
DISMISSAL	DISMISSAL	DISMISSAL	DISMISSAL	DISMISSAL
Vertical Planning	Independent Time/ Teacher Discretion	Principal Discretion e.g. Child Study Teams, ILT, add'l PD or collaboration	Independent Time/ Teacher Discretion	

\*After-dismissal planning blocks may be limited by teacher contracts.



**When making decisions about professional learning, principals and their teams should keep teachers' experiences at the core by:**

Centering professional learning on supporting implementation of instructional materials.

Reviewing and understanding teacher contracts, working commitments, and the length of each teacher's workday.

Listening to teachers' requests for different types of professional learning.

Deciding how to include specials teachers in grade-level planning.

## DECISION POINT 2

### Identify and Assign Instructional Leadership Roles

To increase educators' effectiveness, instructional experts—such as teacher leaders, administrators, or coaches—should lead and guide educator teams. These experts are positioned to use their role to support newer teachers and extend the reach of highly effective teachers to more students. They can leverage their experience to create connected professional development opportunities for teachers and increase teachers' satisfaction, retention, and sense of empowerment.

Effective teacher collaboration and professional learning also requires leaders to identify opportunities for giving and receiving feedback, which promotes teachers' continuous development. Feedback can be motivating and can help teachers set goals in their work, so leaders should embed feedback and growth-oriented collaboration structures into schedules and instructional experts' priorities.



#### **Investing in teacher leaders can benefit the school community by:**

Providing experienced teachers with opportunities to advance in their careers by taking on additional responsibilities for a stipend or increased compensation.

Enabling the strongest teachers to share their skills with other teachers, while staying in the classroom.

Giving teacher leaders access to additional professional learning to deepen their content expertise.

Allowing newer teachers to accelerate their skills at an advanced pace.



### Investing in instructional coaches can benefit educators by:

Providing instructional support, appropriate professional development, and feedback.

Supporting with curriculum adoption and development for robust Tier 1 instruction across grades and content.

Offering varying types and amounts of support based on teachers' experience levels.

Giving teachers targeted support to increase their effectiveness.

Supporting newer teachers who are developing their content expertise and classroom skills.



### Investing in school-based administrators can benefit educators by:

Fostering opportunities for collective planning, meeting preparation, collaboration, connected professional learning, and development.

Aligning with teacher leaders and instructional coaches to structure the time necessary for effective individual and collaborative planning.

Prioritizing additional professional learning for select teachers whose students could benefit from deepened content expertise.

### Scheduling Considerations for Expert-Led Collaboration and Planning

1. Provide sufficient time in the schedule for teacher observations, debriefs, and feedback.
2. Allocate time for thorough coaching cycles.
3. Ensure each school has a low teacher-to-coach ratio.
4. Preserve time, support, and training for instructional experts to develop their own content knowledge and improve their coaching practices.

To learn more about structured career pathways and differentiated pay structures for teachers with varying responsibilities, check out ERS' ["Breaking the Mold Without Breaking the Bank: A Guide to Transforming the Teaching Job"](#) report and [teacher compensation calculator](#).

### DECISION POINT 3

## Find Time for Collaboration

Teachers already have limited time to focus on instructional and non-instructional responsibilities, so professional learning, collaboration, and coaching shouldn't simply add to their workload. Instead, they should make teachers' work less isolated and help develop supportive communities that increase job satisfaction.

Here are six strategic scheduling practices for intentionally embedding professional learning in the school day without increasing working hours.

### 1. Schedule Back-to-Back Periods

#### Implementation

Stack two blocks of planning time together within a weekly schedule.

#### Considerations

Leaders can implement this strategy by stacking specials or enrichment blocks with planning blocks, creating less instructional time in core subjects on those days. Alternatively, a floating, multigrade core content area teacher can push into homerooms to provide science instruction alongside specials instruction.

55 minute periods	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:15-8:55 AM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
8:55-9:50 AM	Specials	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:50-10:45 AM	Math	Writing	Writing	Writing	Specials
10:45-11:55 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
11:55-12:40 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:40-1:15 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
1:15-2:10 PM	Math	Social Studies	Specials	Specials	Reading
2:10-3:05 PM	Open Circle	Specials	Social Studies	Specials	Open Circle

**Blue Boxes:** Individual teacher planning time    **Lime Boxes:** Team collaborative planning time

This schedule shows consistent 55-minute periods. Some subjects, like math and ELA, might require more frequent 55-minute periods in the schedule to help students reach learning goals. [See more on subject time in Priority 1, Decision Point 1.](#)



## 2. Bank Time

### Implementation

Increase planning time on some days by reducing it on others to create longer blocks of consecutive time for in-depth collaboration or planning.

### Considerations

This strategy is useful when teachers have sufficient time on shorter planning days for lesson preparation. In the example below, teachers decrease planning from 55 minutes every day to 45 minutes four times a week and 95 minutes one day a week.

5 DAYS A WEEK 55 minutes of planning time	4 DAYS A WEEK 45 minutes of planning time	1 DAY A WEEK 95 minutes of planning time
Planning (55 minutes)	Planning (45 minutes)	Planning (95 minutes)
Instruction (165 minutes)	Instruction (175 minutes)	Instruction (125 minutes)
Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)
Instruction (150 minutes)	Instruction (150 minutes)	Instruction (150 minutes)

**Blue Boxes:** Individual teacher planning time

**Lime Boxes:** Team collaborative planning time

### 3. Schedule Blocks at the Beginning and End of the Day

#### Implementation

Reorganize the time teachers have at the beginning and end of each day to increase planning time. In some cases, this may result in scheduling a later start or early dismissal for students so that teachers can have extra planning time without increasing their working hours.

#### Considerations

This strategy is useful when teachers are mandated to arrive before or stay after students. In special cases, it might require principals to change the school day's start and end time for specific days. In other cases, external partners can provide enrichment or special programming while teachers focus on planning or collaboration.



5 DAYS A WEEK 55 minutes of planning time and 30 minutes of duty	→	
Duty (15 minutes)	4 DAYS A WEEK 55 minutes of planning time and 20 minutes of duty	1 DAY A WEEK 115 minutes of planning time and 10 minutes of duty
Instruction (205 minutes)	Duty (10 minutes)	Duty (10 minutes)
Recess/Lunch (35 minutes)	Instruction (205 minutes)	Instruction (205 minutes)
Instruction (115 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (45 minutes)	Recess/Lunch (45 minutes)
Planning (55 minutes)	Instruction (115 minutes)	Instruction (115 minutes)
Duty (15 minutes)	Planning (55 minutes)	<b>Planning (115 minutes)</b> 55 minute original planning period + 10 minutes repurposed duty time + 50 minutes repurposed duty time from throughout the week
	Duty (10 minutes)	

## 4. Schedule Blocks During Recess and Lunch

### Implementation

Schedule planning blocks next to non-instructional periods like lunch and recess that are staffed by other educators or administrative professionals. One day a week, teachers have an extended duty-free block for team collaboration. Principals should review union contracts when adjusting teachers' lunch time.

### Considerations

This strategy requires additional staff to cover lunch and recess to ensure teachers have duty-free periods.



55-minute periods	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:15-9:10 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:10-10:05 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:05-11:00 AM	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
11:00-11:55 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
11:55-12:30 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:30-1:25 PM	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials
1:25-2:20 PM	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
2:20-3:15 PM	Science	Open Circle	Social Studies	Science/ Social Studies	Open Circle

**Blue Boxes:** Individual teacher planning time

**Lime Boxes:** Team collaborative planning time

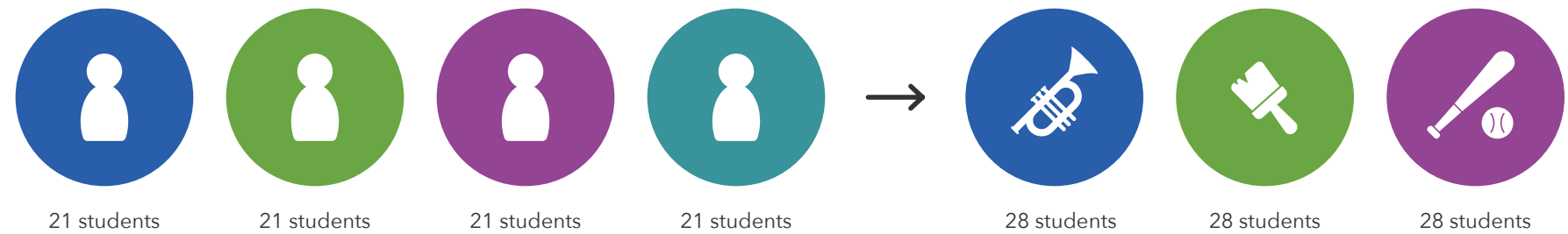
## 5. Increase the Number of Homerooms Scheduled Simultaneously With Specials Blocks

### Implementation

Add more students to specials classes to free up all core teachers within one grade for collaborative planning time.

### Considerations

This strategy works best in schools that have one additional core teacher in a certain grade than the school's total number of elective teachers and where specials classes are not already at or near the class size maximum.



## 6. Schedule Collaboration During Enrichment Periods

### Implementation

Create designated enrichment periods covered by other staff or community partners to give teachers extended collaboration time.

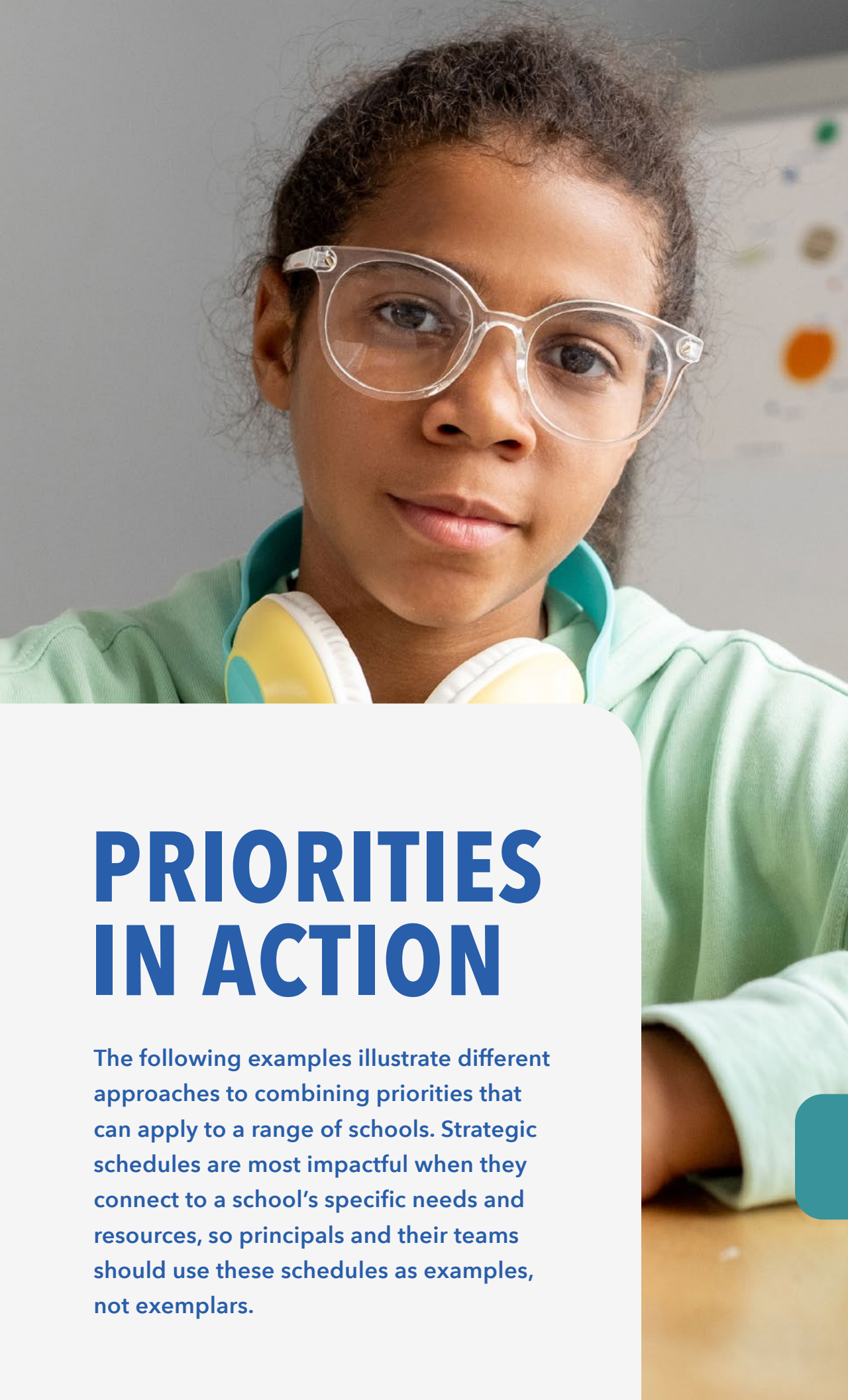
### Considerations

Enrichment periods should provide academic benefit by exploring a topic, project, sport, or activity that is not otherwise prioritized in the elementary schedule. Community partners can help balance the workload, or specials teachers can cover enrichment periods.

55-minute periods	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:15-9:10 AM	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
9:10-10:05 AM	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:05-11:00 AM	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
11:00-11:55 AM	Science	Science	Science	Science	Science
11:55-12:30 PM	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch	Recess/Lunch
12:30-1:25 PM	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment	Intervention/ Enrichment
1:25-2:20 PM	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials
2:20-3:15 PM	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts	Language Arts

Blue Boxes: Individual teacher planning time

Lime Boxes: Team collaborative planning time



# PRIORITIES IN ACTION

The following examples illustrate different approaches to combining priorities that can apply to a range of schools. Strategic schedules are most impactful when they connect to a school's specific needs and resources, so principals and their teams should use these schedules as examples, not exemplars.

## Example 1

This example shows a single-day schedule across multiple grade levels. In a school with multiple sections per grade, classes would follow the same schedule.

KINDERGARTEN	FIRST	SECOND
8:00-8:15 AM Morning Meeting	8:00-8:15 AM Morning Meeting	8:00-8:15 AM Morning Meeting
8:15-10:15 AM ELA	8:15-9:15 AM Math	8:15-8:45 AM Intervention/
10:15-10:45 AM Science	9:15-9:45 AM Intervention/	8:45-9:30 AM Specials
10:45-11:10 AM Recess	9:45-10:30 AM Specials	9:30-11:30 AM ELA
11:10-11:35 AM Lunch	10:30-11:00 AM Social Studies	11:30-11:55 AM Recess
11:35-12:35 PM Math	11:00-11:30 AM Science	11:55-12:20 AM Lunch
12:35-1:20 PM Specials	11:30-11:55 AM Recess	12:20-12:50 AM Social Studies
1:20-1:50 PM Intervention/	11:55-12:20 PM Lunch	12:50-1:20 PM Science
1:50-2:20 PM Social Studies	12:20-2:20 PM ELA	1:20-2:20 PM Math
2:20-2:30 PM Closing	2:20-2:30 PM Closing	2:20-2:30 PM Closing

Staggering ELA blocks enables other staff to provide push-in **inclusion** support.

SEL lessons are the focus of morning meeting, with other curriculum-embedded SEL throughout the day.

Dedicated **intervention time** means students are not pulled from core classes.

Intervention is stacked next to specials to give grade teams **extended planning time**.

Leaders can combine subject time to create longer interdisciplinary or project-based learning blocks, such as STEM in the afternoon for second grade.

## Example 2

This example shows multi-day schedule options across a single grade. It assumes variation within the weekly schedule by changing one day per week.

	SCHEDULE OPTION 1	SCHEDULE OPTION 2	SCHEDULE OPTION 3
7:30 AM	Arrival/Morning Meeting	Arrival/Morning Meeting	Arrival/Morning Meeting
8:00 AM	ELA	Humanities	ELA
8:30 AM			
9:00 AM	Specials	Recess	Math
9:30 AM			
10:00 AM	Science	Lunch	Lunch
10:30 AM			
11:00 AM	Intervention	STEM	Enrichment
11:30 AM			
12:00 PM	Social Studies		
12:30 PM	Recess	Specials	
1:00 PM	Math	Intervention	
1:30 PM			
2:00 PM			
2:30 PM			
3:00 PM	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal

Prioritizes early morning, Tier 1 literacy block.

Grouping subjects creates opportunities for interdisciplinary or **project-based learning**.

Some weeks, enrichment time may be preserved for an **SEL lesson with the school's SEL specialist**.

Leveraging local partners, technology, and/or non-teaching staff to create longer **enrichment** opportunities and enable **extended PLC time** twice per month.

Dedicated intervention time means students are not pulled from core classes.





## Lower Elementary

	KINDERGARTEN				FIRST				SECOND			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
30 MIN	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
30 MIN					Social Studies	Social Studies	Specials	Specials	Social Studies	Social Studies	Specials	Specials
30 MIN	Math	Math	Math	Math	Intervention	Intervention	Specials	Specials	Intervention	Intervention	Specials	Specials
30 MIN					Specials	Specials	Intervention	Intervention	Specials	Specials	Intervention	Intervention
30 MIN	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention			Math	Math	Specials	Specials	Social Studies	Social Studies
30 MIN	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	ELA	ELA	Science	Science	Math	Math	ELA	ELA
30 MIN							Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch		
30 MIN	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch			Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Lunch	Lunch
30 MIN	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Lunch	Lunch			Science	Science	Recess	Recess
30 MIN					Recess	Recess	Social Studies	Social Studies	ELA	ELA	Math	Math
30 MIN	ELA	ELA	ELA	ELA	Math	Math	ELA	ELA	ELA	ELA	Math	Math
30 MIN					Science	Science			Science	Science	Science	Science
30 MIN	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal
30 MIN	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal								

Differentiated **per-subject Tier 1 time across grade levels** reflects school and curriculum priorities.

**Intervention** stacked with specials in staggered blocks allows for **shared teacher planning** within and across grade levels.

Schedules that stack math and science can provide interdisciplinary learning across content areas.

Schedulers can differentiate Tier 1 timing within **grade levels**, ensuring push-in staff can support multiple homerooms.

### Example 3

This example shows a single-day schedule across multiple homerooms and grade levels and details how schools can create different, within-grade schedules.

## Upper Elementary

THIRD					FOURTH				FIFTH			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
30 MIN	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
30 MIN	ELA	ELA	Math	Math	Math	Math	ELA	ELA	Math	Math	ELA	ELA
30 MIN	Math	Math	Science	Science	Science	Science	Math	Math	Science	Science	Math	Math
30 MIN	Lunch	Lunch	ELA	ELA	Intervention	Intervention	Lunch	Lunch	Intervention	Intervention	Lunch	Lunch
30 MIN	Recess	Recess	Lunch	Lunch	Specials	Specials	Recess	Recess	Specials	Specials	Recess	Recess
30 MIN	Science	Science	Recess	Recess	Lunch	Lunch	Science	Science	Lunch	Lunch	Science	Science
30 MIN	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Recess	Recess	Specials	Specials	Recess	Recess	Specials	Specials
30 MIN	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	ELA	ELA	Intervention	Intervention	ELA	ELA	Intervention	Intervention
30 MIN	Specials	Specials	Specials	Specials	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies
30 MIN	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal	Dismissal

Schedules that stack math and science can provide interdisciplinary learning across content areas.

**Intervention** stacked with specials in staggered blocks allows for **shared teacher planning** within and across grade levels.

Differentiated **per-subject Tier 1 time across grade levels** reflects school and curriculum priorities.

Schedulers can differentiate Tier 1 timing within **grade levels**, ensuring push-in staff can support multiple homerooms.

### Example 3

This example shows a single-day schedule across multiple homerooms and grade levels and details how schools can create different, within-grade schedules.

## Example 4

This example shows a student-view schedule for a class that employs departmentalization across two homerooms. When departmentalizing, two teachers can support either two homerooms or two grades, depending on their school size.

	HR 4TH GRADE	HR 5TH GRADE
8:00-8:30	Morning Meeting (Teacher A)	Arrival/Morning Meeting
8:30-9:00	ELA (Teacher A)	Math (Teacher B)
9:30-10:00	ELA (Teacher A)	Intervention (Teacher B)
10:00-10:45	Music	PE
10:45-11:00	Math (Teacher B)	ELA (Teacher A)
11:00-11:30	Math (Teacher B)	ELA (Teacher A)
11:30-12:00	Intervention (Teacher B)	ELA (Teacher A)
12:00-12:30	Recess	Recess
12:30-1:00	Lunch	Lunch
1:00-1:45	Science (Teacher B)	Social Studies (Teacher A)
1:45-2:15	Social Studies (Teacher A)	Science (Teacher B)
2:15-2:35	Closing Circle (Teacher A)	Closing Circle (Teacher B)

Aligning specials time equips homeroom teachers who share students with **collaborative planning time**.

Homerooms ground their days with SEL lessons during morning meeting and closing circle, allowing time for community building **social-emotional development outside of formal instruction**.

Principals can use departmentalization to **leverage teacher expertise and content knowledge**.





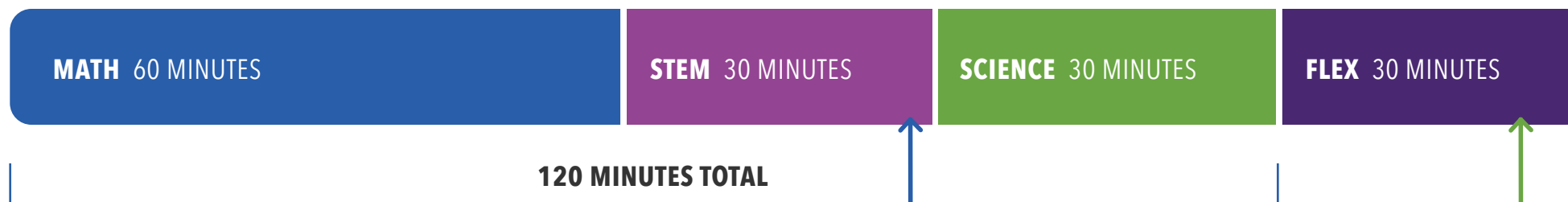
## Example 5

This example shows a blocked schedule that prioritizes interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

### STANDARD APPROACH



### INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH



Provides opportunity for project-based learning modules that cut across math and science standards.

Consider using time for targeted intervention to differentiate time and attention for higher needs students.

As a scheduling tool, interdisciplinary lessons decrease the number of lessons a homeroom teacher will need to prep during the day. Interdisciplinary lessons often allow students to work on project-based lessons that help them develop skills to be successful outside the classroom. Research suggests that instruction targeted to dynamic, project-based, and interdisciplinary lessons increases student achievement.<sup>viii</sup>

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to scheduling instructional minutes allows for more flexible uses of time and opportunities to differentiate time and attention to better meet student needs.

## APPENDIX A

# An Overview of Homeroom-Based and Departmentalization Models



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	DESCRIPTION	CO-PLANNING REQUIRED
<b>Format</b>	A teacher is assigned to a homeroom and provides instruction for all subjects throughout the day (often excluding fine arts, music, and physical education).	Teachers specialize in and teach a few subjects to multiple homerooms of students. Specialization can occur within and across grade levels.
<b>Approach</b>	In non-departmentalized grades, each section of students receives all Tier 1, core instruction from the same teacher.	<p>In departmentalized grades, students rotate between two or more teachers for core subject instruction.</p> <p>Rather than focusing on all grades, principals can departmentalize certain grades or within grades, based on their context.</p>
<b>Benefits</b>	<p>Teachers are responsible for a smaller group of students, compared to departmentalized models.</p> <p>Teachers are able to facilitate stronger teacher-student relationships.</p>	<p>Teachers have a lower prep load.</p> <p>Allows for deeper content expertise development.</p> <p>Novice teachers are able to learn new content and classroom management skills effectively.</p>
<b>Considerations</b>	<p>Potentially burdensome, especially for novice teachers, who must prep for all core content areas.</p> <p>Teachers must find time to align instructional materials within and across grades for core content instruction.</p>	<p>Teachers interact with more students.</p> <p>Recent studies have shown departmentalization having limited or negative effects on student achievement.<sup>x</sup></p> <p>Similar studies have shown negative impacts to relationships between students and teachers within departmentalized grades. This may outweigh the gains from increased teacher content knowledge.<sup>ix</sup></p>

## Departmentalization Considerations

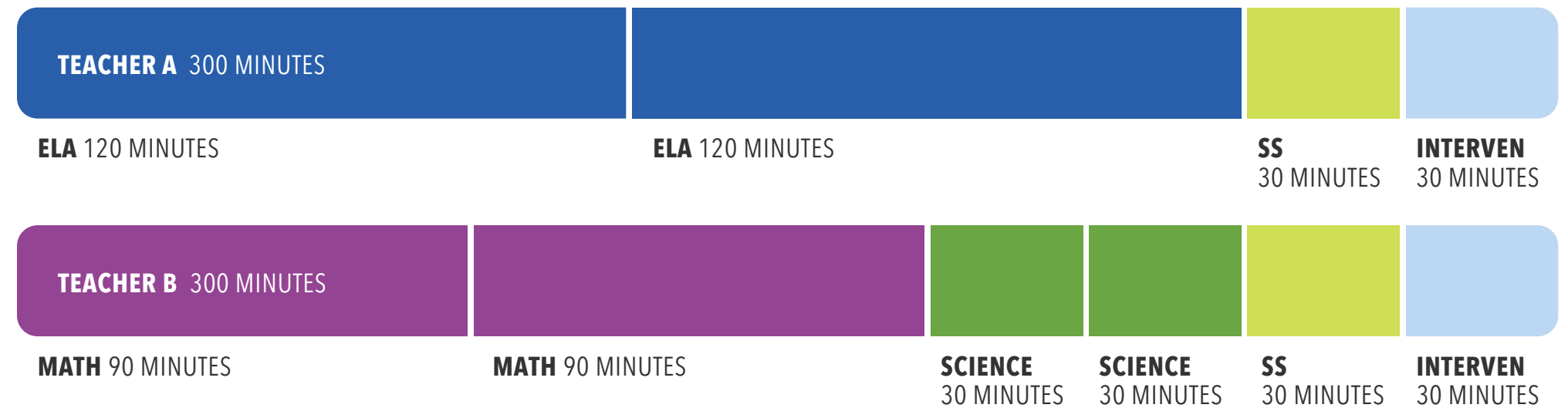
### Varied instructional models can enhance the empowering, rigorous content available to students.

When departmentalizing, principals should encourage teachers to promote dynamic and meaningful interaction across content areas and learning contexts. An educator who teaches a group of students both social studies and ELA, for example, could consider how ELA texts complement social studies lessons. Professional learning communities play a critical role in providing teachers collaboration time to understand content across different content areas.

- Creating balanced subject time allotments between teachers, which might be dependent on the number of homerooms within or across grade levels.
- Building sufficient collaboration time between teachers who share student teams.

### Departmentalization structure for dividing instructional minutes across TWO teachers

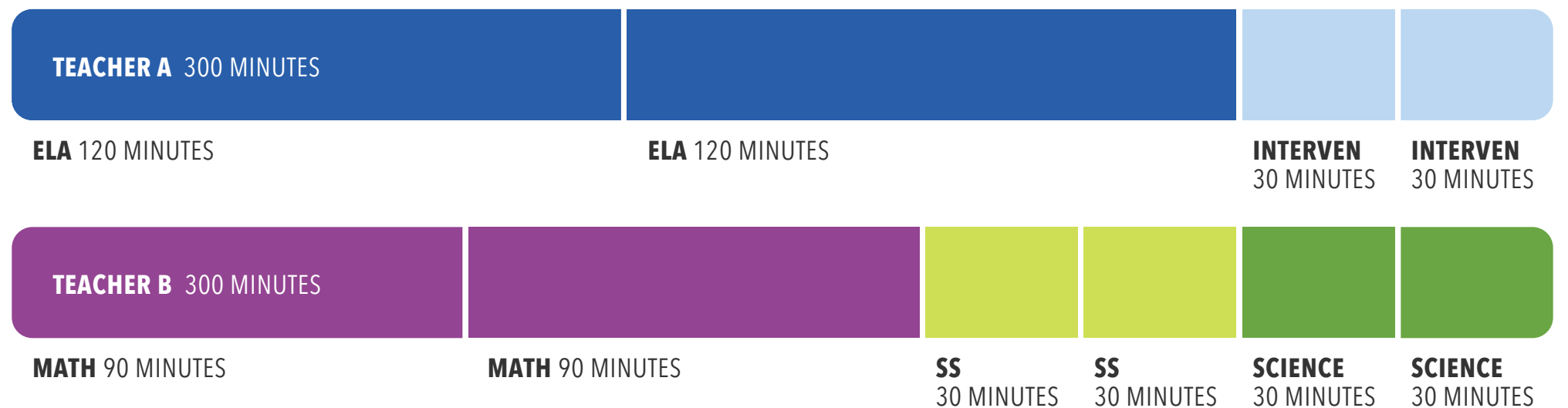
#### OPTION 1



#### Classroom Instruction Breakdown

Teacher A: ELA, Social Studies  
 Teacher B: Math, Science, Social Studies  
 Both: Intervention

#### OPTION 2

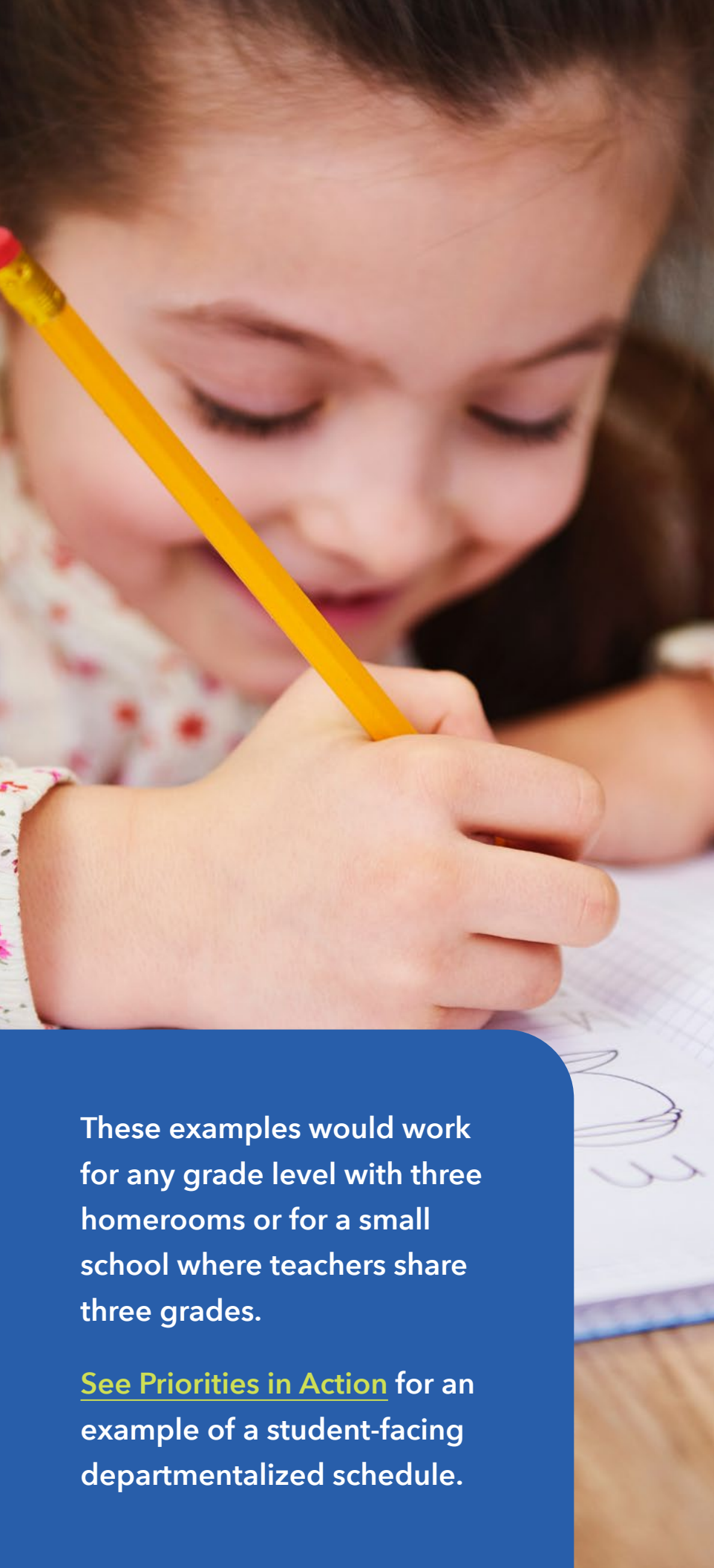


#### Classroom Instruction Breakdown

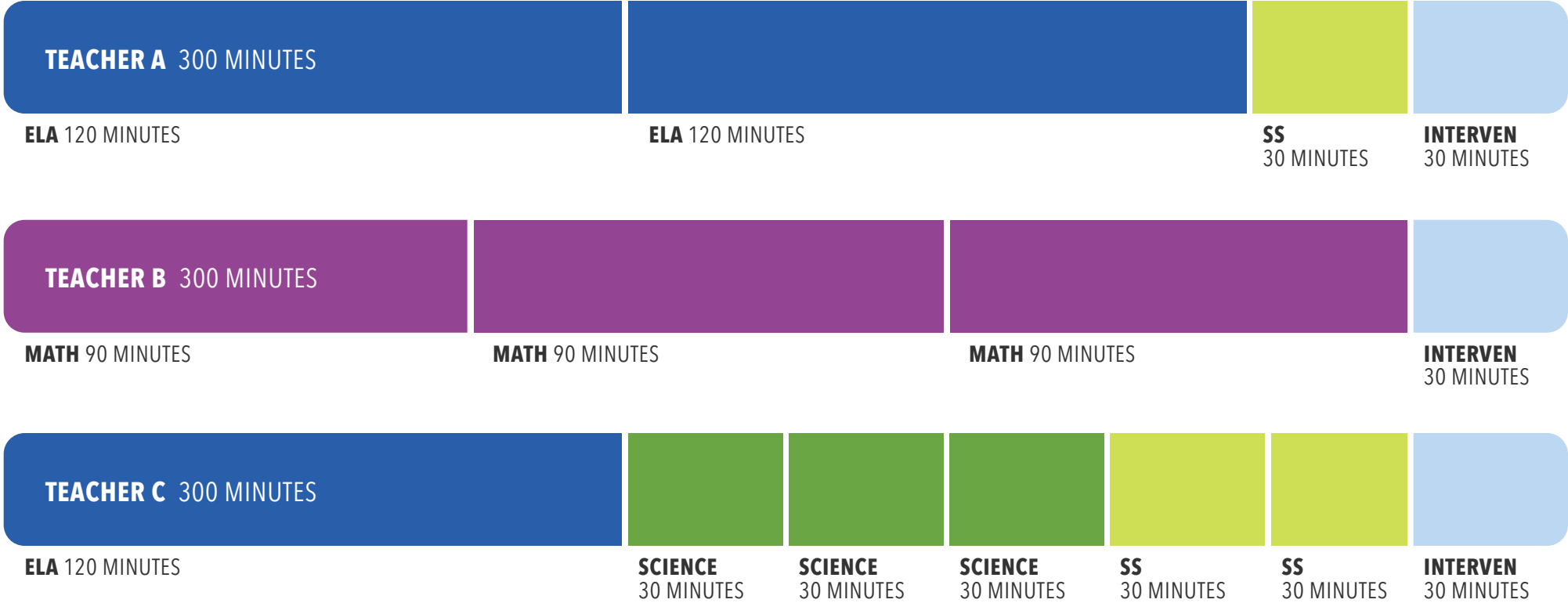
Teacher A: ELA, Intervention  
 Teacher B: Math, Science, Social Studies

The visualizations to the right are illustrative of total teacher time, by subject – not chronological teacher or student schedules.

These examples would work for any grade level with an even number of homerooms or for a small school where teachers share two grades.



### Departmentalization structure for dividing instructional minutes across THREE teachers



#### Classroom Instruction Breakdown

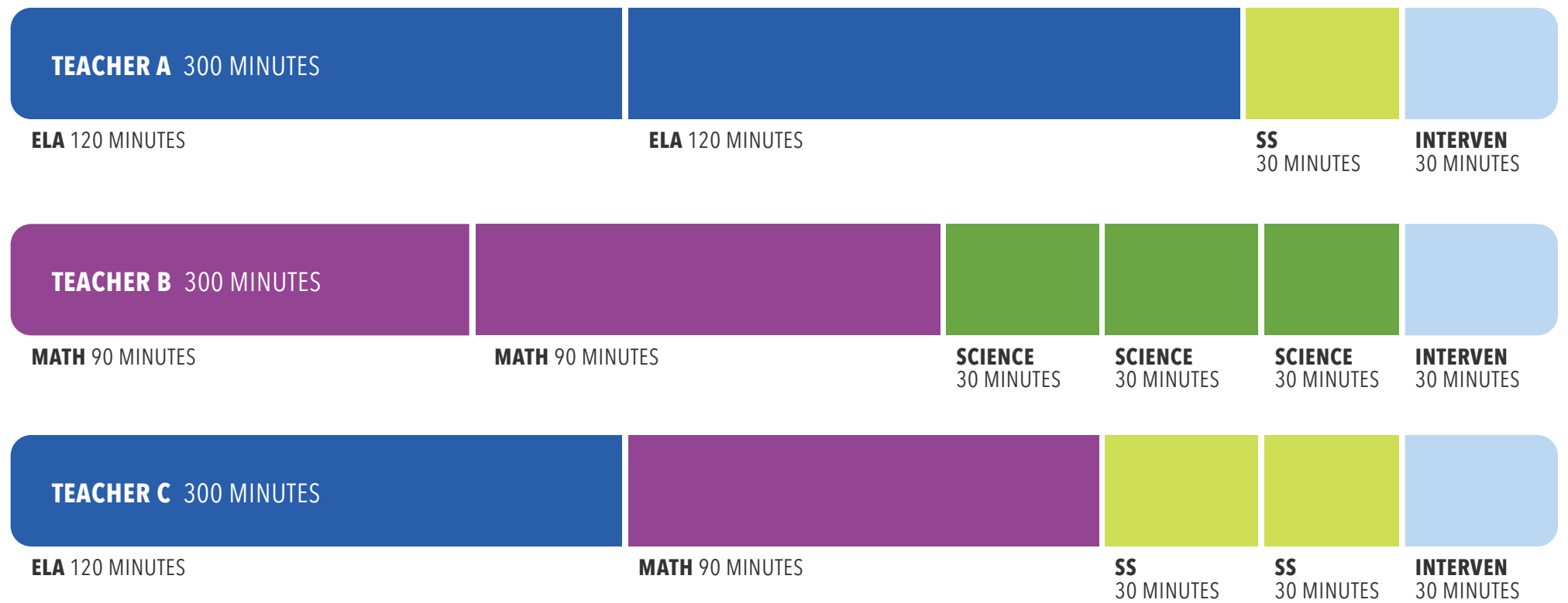
Teacher A: ELA, Social Studies  
Teacher B: Math  
Teacher C: ELA, Science, Social Studies  
All: Intervention

These examples would work for any grade level with three homerooms or for a small school where teachers share three grades.

[See Priorities in Action](#) for an example of a student-facing departmentalized schedule.



### Departmentalization structure for dividing instructional minutes across THREE teachers

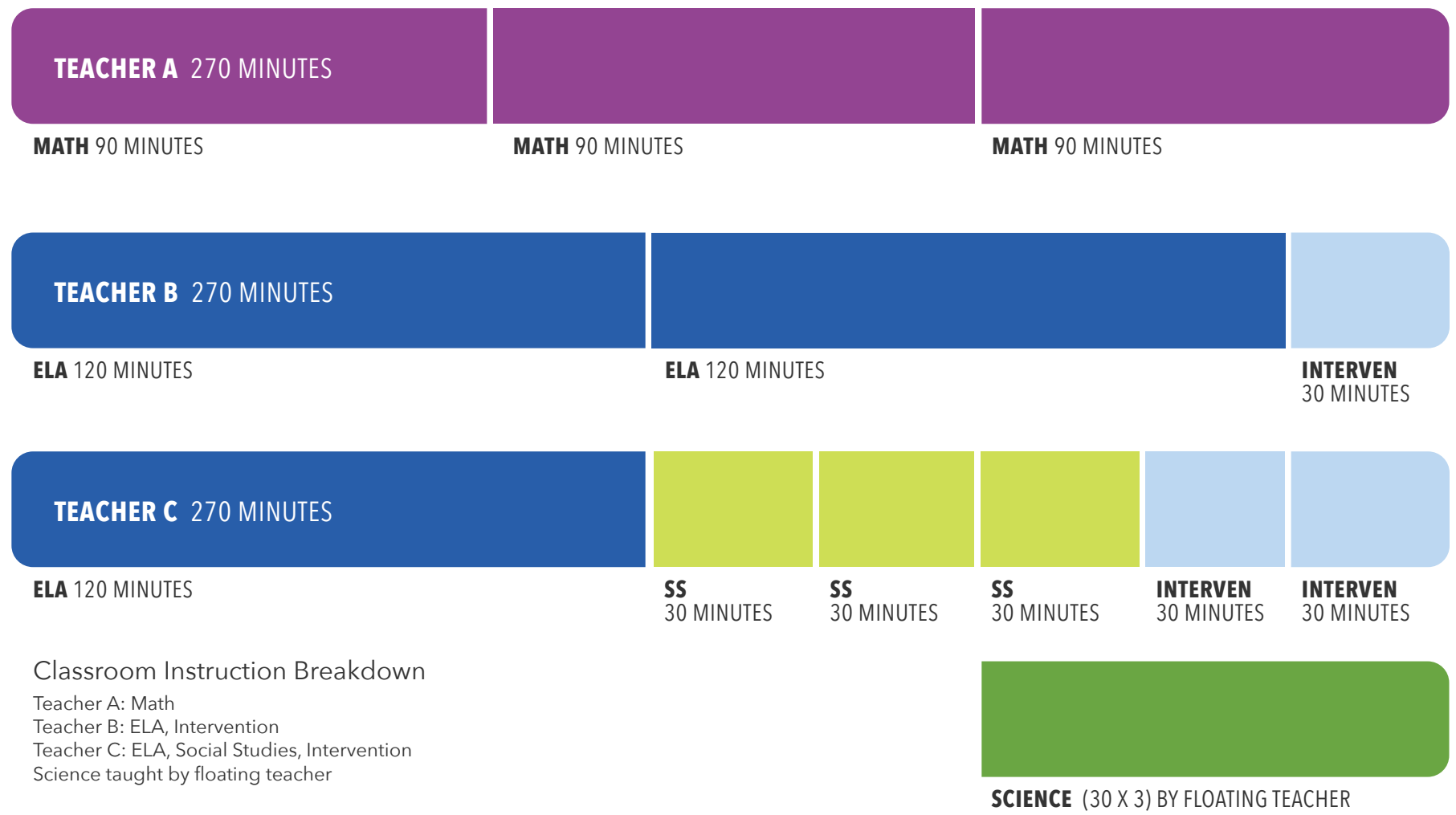


#### Classroom Instruction Breakdown

- Teacher A: ELA, Social Studies
- Teacher B: Math, Science
- Teacher C: ELA, Math, Social Studies
- All: Intervention



## Departmentalization structure for dividing instructional minutes across THREE teachers



## APPENDIX B

### An Overview of the Push-In and Co-Teaching Models

Based on available resources and teacher expertise, principals should consider implementing one of the following two-teacher instructional models.<sup>xi</sup>

INSTRUCTION MODEL	DESCRIPTION	CO-PLANNING REQUIRED	GROUP SIZE IMPACT
<u>Co-Teaching</u>	One special education teacher and one general education teacher share teaching responsibilities for a class that includes students with and without disabilities.	Regularly (e.g., multiple times per week)	Decreased throughout the day.
<b>Push-In Support</b>	An additional teacher works closely with students in the general education classroom, providing specially designed instruction or related services for targeted time periods.	Sometimes (e.g., at least once per week)	Decreased during push-in periods.

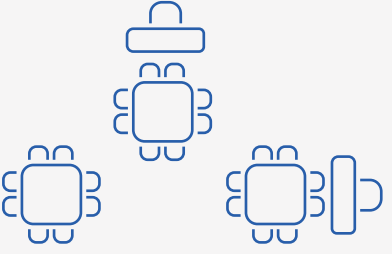
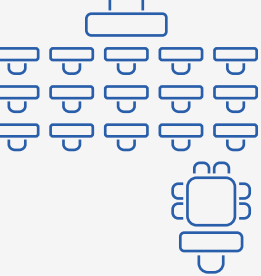
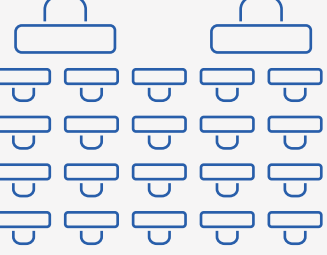
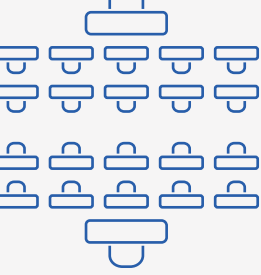
**Co-teaching can result in better instructional quality for all students, but it requires significant investment and planning.**

Having an additional adult in the classroom provides primary teachers with a daily source of informal, professional feedback, which can strengthen instruction. Collaborative planning and instruction might also result in more engaging lessons for all students. Schools considering allocating resources to co-teaching should prioritize grade levels with the highest need.



# Instructional Strategies Enabled By Push-In Support and Co-Teaching

When two teachers lead a classroom, they can differentiate instruction using a combination of strategies.<sup>vi</sup>

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE
<b>Parallel Teaching</b>	Educators each teach the same content simultaneously to one half of the class.	Easier classroom management due to smaller/differentiated instructional groups.	
<b>Station Teaching</b>	Educators teach different content to rotating groups of students.	Leverages each teacher's strengths, includes smaller instructional groups, and allows for refined lesson planning.	
<b>Alternative Teaching</b>	One educator teaches most students, while the other instructs a small group in a more specialized format, <a href="#">based on data and observations of students' skills</a> . <sup>xii</sup>	Gives students opportunities to close instructional gaps, can help students catch up on missed content, and focuses resources on a target student population.	
<b>Team Teaching</b>	Both educators lead direct instruction for the whole class at the same time.	Leverages two teachers' expertise and instructional strategies, giving both teachers the spotlight in front of the entire class.	

## When implementing co-teaching and push-in support models, principals and their teams should provide teachers with:

- 1. Collaborative planning time.** This time enables teachers to partner effectively, develop lessons, and share responsibilities. (Learn more about how to make time for collaborative planning in [Priority 4](#).)
- 2. Time to review IEPs.** Co-teachers and the school's psychologist should review current IEPs to determine which students with disabilities might be best served in the chosen model. Co-teachers should have time to assess individual student needs and identify any unnecessarily restrictive components of a student's IEP.
- 3. Scheduling flexibility.** Staggering the timing of core instructional blocks to enable additional special education or English learner staff to float between classrooms or grades. ([See Priorities in Action](#) for an example of a staggered model of instruction.)

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