

Surveying teachers' time to improve the schedule

As a part of their work with DMGroup, Bibb County's elementary school teachers kept a log of how they spent their time for a week. "It was just amazing to get that data," Kilcrease said. There were additional facts and figures supporting observations that instructional time varied across the district. The survey showed the number of meetings teachers attended, the amount of time spent on a particular subject, and time spent in transition. As suspected, the survey revealed variations in the amount of time spent on each subject. Some students were receiving as many as 50 more minutes in a subject than others.¹²⁵

Guaranteeing equitable access to instructional time

One of the most significant changes to emerge from the review of scheduling data was the decision to set guidelines for instruction by subject. Rather than having wide variation among schools in the district, all elementary schools from K to 5 now include in their schedules 120 minutes of reading instruction, 75 minutes of math instruction, and at least 45 minutes each day for science and social studies.

Increasing equity through intervention and enrichment blocks

In addition to establishing guidelines for each subject, ensuring that all students have access to academic subjects on a consistent basis, Bibb County leaders also rearranged the schedule to include a separate block for intervention and enrichment time. No longer would students with IEPs and multilingual learners be pulled in the middle of much-needed core instruction and at unpredictable intervals. Instead, they had a dedicated block of time during which they could regularly and reliably receive needed support without missing out on essential core instruction. The intervention block was also intentionally staggered to ensure that enough educators are available to provide support to students who need it. Each grade level has its own intervention time, explained Dr. Cami Hamlin, the principal of Springdale Elementary School.

"That means every extra teacher who's not a homeroom teacher can support that grade level during that intervention time." Before the guidelines, Hamlin and her team kept students after school to provide intervention. So she welcomed the district's new guidelines, which allowed her to fit the intervention block within the standard day: "It was nice when the whole district required us to schedule intervention when we started using DMG[roup]."

Principal Askew also appreciated the addition of the intervention block. "I would not be able to do what I do for my children and my staff without it," she said. Yet, like Hamlin, she hadn't figured out how to add a designated time for intervention without adding time to the schedule. "I thought I knew the schedule inside and out," Askew said, so it was a welcome change when [DMGroup] "managed to squeeze in intervention...without changing the hours in the day."

In walkthroughs the following year, over 90 percent of teachers were following the instructional guidelines. Students across the district were receiving more equitable and consistent access to core content while also receiving access to interventions and support.¹²⁶ The district-wide consistency in instruction and intervention time was a direct result of a more strategic approach to scheduling. Kilcrease noted the immense opportunity within the schedule to increase students' access to equitable learning opportunities. "There's a lot that can be done [through the schedule], and it is not that hard," Kilcrease said. However, doing so does require schools and districts to act affirmatively, "It has to be intentional," Kilcrease added. "It's intentional work."

With the right tools and data and a commitment to equity, Bibb County transformed its scheduling system in just a few years. Schools across the district receive centralized scheduling support and guidance that helps them afford students, particularly those in need of greater supports, more equitable access to learning across the district. Before the scheduling process was revised, schools “were doing their own thing,” Kilcrease said. “But now we’re all striving to do the same thing.”