

INSIDE DMGROUP

Realizing Instructional Objectives Through Strategic Scheduling

School District of Lancaster (PA)

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Originally published in the *District Management Journal*, v.31, Spring 2022

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When District Management Group announced its fall 2021 Secondary Scheduling Institute, the School District of Lancaster (PA) felt it came at an opportune time. The district had merged its two high schools in 2013—McCaskey East and J.P. McCaskey—into one school, McCaskey High School, operating on two campuses. A significant disparity in facilities and course offerings had existed between the two schools, originally stemming from the difference in the two buildings' sizes. In addition, the larger school served an overwhelmingly white population and the smaller served a mostly non-white population. While the merger had accomplished its main goal of providing more equal and equitable access to course offerings, little adjustment had been made to the schedule and disparities persisted. With students needing to travel between the two buildings, a significant amount of instructional time was being lost; this was an immediate pain point that the district wanted to address to improve student outcomes and to increase equity.



Justin Reese
Principal, McCaskey High School

Having participated in DMGroup's A-ROI Institute in the spring of 2020, the School District of Lancaster (SDoL) had experienced the benefits of DMGroup's format of professional development—having district teams learn together, tackle a real district challenge over a period of months, and be able to bring their skills back to the district. "Through the work at the A-ROI Institute, the team's mindset shifted. This work opened our eyes to other opportunities of study within the district," commented Matthew Przywara, SDoL chief of finance and operations. Upon hearing about DMGroup's Secondary Scheduling Institute (SSI), the district embraced the opportunity to have a district team learn best practices in secondary scheduling and tackle building a new schedule for McCaskey High School.

FAST FACTS


School District of Lancaster
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LANCASTER (PA)

10,384 students

- **61.6%** Hispanic
- **16.3%** Black
- **12.4%** White
- **4.4%** Asian
- **5.3%** Multiracial
- **86.9%** Economically disadvantaged
- **19.4%** English language learner
- **18.7%** Special education
- **6.4%** Homeless
- **0.1%** Military-connected

Total Schools:

21

(1 K-12, 1 K-8, 12 elementary, 4 middle, 1 high school, 2 alternative schools)

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We now understand the schedule to be a critical tool for what we're trying to achieve in terms of instruction.

– Justin Reese

Principal, McCaskey High School

School District of Lancaster Launches Their Work with SSI

Each team participating in DMGroup's Secondary Scheduling Institute was asked to pick a real scheduling challenge from their district to tackle. SDoL knew from the start their focus would be redesigning the schedule of McCaskey High School, and their primary goal would be to reduce the amount of time students spend traveling between buildings and thereby increase time for instruction.

Creating the Team

Participating districts are asked to send teams of up to eight individuals—typically those in the roles of principal, teacher, counselor, district academic lead, and a district staff member involved in the scheduling process. With years of experience in professional development, DMGroup finds team-based participation particularly powerful. Each district team develops a base of shared knowledge and has time to work collaboratively; the teams then bring their skills and sense of teamwork back to the district, allowing the work to be sustained and even expanded long after this professional development session ends.

SDoL quickly assembled the following team:

- **McCaskey High School Principal** Justin Reese was selected to serve as the team lead for the district team. The principal's role was to ensure

that the perspectives of various stakeholders at the high school were taken into account, to provide critical feedback to different schedule options, and to share information as needed back to the stakeholders.

- **The master scheduler for the district**, James Weidemoyer, provided access to all of the necessary data, and would do the work of building the schedules with the team, running scenarios, and creating reports.
- **The coordinator of electives**, Mike Slechta, provided key teacher perspectives about how the different schedule options would impact classroom teachers, students, and teachers going between buildings.
- **High school counselor** Pam Terry provided insight into student concerns and parent feedback, and identified current scheduling challenges and pain points. The counselor provided an intimate understanding of how the schedule works in the buildings and areas where it could be improved once students start asking for schedule changes, etc.
- **The district chief of finance and operations**, Matt Przywara, was critical to ensuring that the high school's priorities were aligned to district priorities and that the schedule model aligned with district budgeting and staffing constraints.

Total Staff:

1,646

Per Pupil Expenditure:

\$23,992

Operating Budget:

\$250,000,000

Graduation Rate:

81%

Source: Future Ready PA Index, <https://futurereadypa.org/District/FastFacts?id=036133252160110250222053180028073207165005230052> (as of April 21, 2022)



McCaskey East



J.P. McCaskey

Learning from a Cohort

Another key feature of the Secondary Scheduling Institute is that teams from different districts are brought together to create a cohort. During group sessions, teams present their work on their schedules, and share priorities, benefits, and challenges. The cohort offers a unique opportunity for members to build relationships and partnerships with each other and get feedback from outside of their district team. This collaborative community spirit fosters the sharing of best practices and problem-solving approaches.

The Work Begins

The fall 2021 SSI launched in October and spanned four months. The Institute was composed of three virtual lectures during which DMGroup shared best practices garnered from research and their work with districts around the nation. These sessions included breakout time for teams to process new learnings as well as time for whole-group discussions. Following each lecture, each district had a coaching session with a DMGroup expert to help them apply their learnings and tackle specific questions unique to the specific challenge at hand.

Analyzing the Use of Time

SDoL started the first session by reflecting on their goals and priorities. They leveraged DMGroup tools to analyze their current high school schedule and determine how many minutes are spent on core instruction, non-core, and

non-instruction (lunch, passing periods, etc.). After conducting a detailed data analysis using DMGroup's approach, the team discovered that due to transit times between the campuses, many students were losing a full period of instruction every 12 days. Secondly, they found that having a full period for lunch was preventing the school from maximizing instructional time or resources. And, the team came to the realization that much of the master schedule was predicated on the scheduling preferences of approximately 10% of the school population. These three findings led the team to develop a plan to increase instructional minutes in a focused and targeted manner. Through this work, the team gained a deep appreciation for scheduling as a vehicle to drive the instructional and organizational goals of the school.

A Deep Look at Offerings and Access

During the next session of the Institute, the district learned how to analyze their current course offerings, staffing models, and student access to rigorous courses. Using an equity-focused lens, teams examined the demographics of students enrolled in AP courses, taking AP tests, and passing AP tests.

Understanding the enrollment and related travel for the students in these courses allowed the SDoL team to identify which courses should be offered in both buildings as well as which courses could potentially be grouped together. The team quickly identified 20 courses that

created most of the travel between the buildings. The team then spent significant time identifying ways that some of these courses could be offered in both buildings, while being mindful of maintaining the one-school approach of the high school. After much work and analysis, the SDoL team realized they could potentially reduce the number of students traveling between buildings from 220 students to only 20 students.

Taking Action and Having Impact

During the last session, the district focused on how to move forward. The team reflected on their current scheduling timeline and how to align it with staffing and budgeting decisions while also planning how to translate school priorities into schedules to ensure this alignment.

In the final phase of their work at the Institute, the SDoL team created a three-year plan that would allow the district to phase in changes over time and continue to make adjustments based on analysis of data. The three-year plan would also allow time to communicate changes to the community, incorporate teacher and stakeholder feedback,

and build support. Specifically, the three-year plan included the following priorities: (1) reduce travel time each year by focusing on the incoming cohort of students (i.e., ninth-graders); (2) explore the opportunity to adjust the grading period to a quarter or semester system; and (3) consider the institution of a new school schedule during this three-year period.

“We now understand the schedule to be a critical tool for what we’re trying to achieve in terms of instruction,” said McCaskey High School Principal Reese, who was also the SSI team lead. SSI helped the School District of Lancaster team understand how they could leverage the schedule as an instructional tool to help the high school and the district as a whole deliver more for their students. Far from being an administrative chore, scheduling has the power to effect improvements for their students, the team realized. The team and district leadership are excited about the opportunities the process uncovered to reduce travel time and improve equity between the two buildings, and are looking forward to implementing schedule changes for the benefit of all of their students. ♦

What Is DMGroup’s Secondary Scheduling Institute?

DMGroup’s Secondary Scheduling Institute is an in-depth training program that builds a district team’s capacity to design best-in-class secondary schedules. DMGroup shares the best practices we’ve learned in our research and our work with school districts around the nation, and we provide a process to help districts tackle the work.

What Will You Learn?

The district team will build capacity and learn to:

- ✓ **Design schedules aligned to school and district goals**
- ✓ **Plan and schedule effective academic intervention programming**
- ✓ **Maximize core instructional time for students**
- ✓ **Incorporate student voice and choice into the scheduling process**
- ✓ **Maximize staffing to make the most of your funding**

How Will You Learn?

The team will learn a research-backed methodical approach to building best-in-class schedules through:

- **Working together as a district team:** Having district teams learn and work together builds capacity and shared understanding that allow efforts to be sustained and expanded even after the Institute training ends
- **Multimodal training spanning approximately four months:** The Institute incorporates webinars, remote group meetings, and coaching calls over a period of four months
- **Learning by doing:** Since the best way to learn is by doing, each team works on designing a schedule for their own district with the support of coaching, tools, templates, and guides
- **Peer network support:** District teams will have an opportunity to meet other like-minded teams and have a cohort with whom they can learn and share ideas.

DMGroup’s Secondary Scheduling Institute helps your team build schedules that will improve students’ opportunities and outcomes.

