

EQUITABLE SCHOOL SCHEDULING

CHERYL HIBBELN

LORI RHODES

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Cheryl Hibbeln is the Founder and President of IlluminatED Collective, a group of transformative educational consultants who partner with businesses, nonprofits, institutions of higher education, and school districts to support strategic planning and change management in service of equitable outcomes for all. Cheryl spent over 20 years in the San Diego Unified School District, where as a principal she was part of the successful transformation of a large urban high school into four award-winning small schools, and as an executive director who designed efforts to align the district graduation requirements to the University of California

entry course requirements, expanded the dual enrollment program with the colleges, and redesigned secondary site schedule efforts. Cheryl knows what it takes to lead diverse district teams to achieve challenging systemic efforts in service of equity. In addition, Cheryl built impactful partnerships with business/industry, philanthropic, higher education, nonprofit, and cross-district leaders to design transformative experiences for students across the city of San Diego.

Cheryl's contributions to the work in San Diego Unified has been highlighted in several recent reports, including the Local Control Funding Formula Case Study, *Giving Learning & Graduation New Meaning: One Student at a Time* (University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Transformation of Schools); the *San Diego Unified School District: Positive Outliers Case Study* (Learning Policy Institute); Education Resource Strategies' Districts at Work series, *San Diego Unified School District: Building Paths to Graduation for Every Student*; and the SDUSD's *Board Select Committee on Graduation Standards and Strategies*. Cheryl holds an MA in Education from Chapman University; a BA in Literature and Writing Studies from California State University, San Marcos; and Professional Clear Administrative and Teaching Credentials from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Learn more about bringing Cheryl Hibbeln to your school or district at illuminatedcollective.org.



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Her areas of expertise include scheduling, teaching English learners, using data and assessments to increase student achievement, improving school culture, and developing leaders in schools. Lori is committed to providing equitable and inclusive educational opportunities by creating a rigorous and supportive culture that results in a sense of belonging for all students.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Dare to Lead*, Brene Brown (2018) states that to be unclear is to be unkind. In the field of education, this mantra is often invoked when discussing how difficult conversations must be held to create accountability and true understanding of the work that must be done to improve schools. This same principle can be applied to the process of scheduling students at the secondary level—the purpose and practice of scheduling must be clearly communicated to cultivate a shared purpose around why certain shifts must be made in traditional practices in the service of equity.

Having served as school site and district leaders as well as education consultants in a variety of contexts, we have witnessed how murky and unclear scheduling routines have led to practices that have left many students on the margins of our educational system. Writing this book allowed us to offer a clear path to creating an equitable approach to scheduling. Over the course of the following eight chapters, we hope to illustrate that the schedule should not be static and restrictive, tracking students into prescriptive pathways, but rather it should be flexible and sensitive to the learning needs of all students. Effective scheduling can and should serve as a strategy to eliminate the isolation that too often permeates our educational systems.

SCHEDULING AS A TOOL FOR EQUITY

Too often scheduling at the secondary level is the responsibility of one or two counselors and administrators who work in isolation from the central office. These staff are doing double-duty of their daily jobs and creating a complicated system where all students are scheduled, and staff have their assignments before they leave for summer break. The pressure can be enormous, and accuracy and student need may not always be the top priority. The framework and tools provided in this book will put administration and teams in control of the process to create equitable, efficient, and sustainable cycles of scheduling.

The schedule must be aligned to the values and vision of a school system that is inclusive and equitable with the aim of supporting the learning and achievement of all students. The schedule doesn't just divide the day so people know where they are supposed to be at any given time, but rather it reflects

the philosophy of the leadership of a school. If a school has the goal of student-focused success outcomes, this will be evident in a strategically created schedule. The structuring of time and sequences of courses must be done with intentionality as they ultimately influence everything from how teachers collaborate, to how students move throughout the day, to what options students have following graduation. When the schedule is only viewed logistically, those for whom less is expected or provided—students of color, students with disabilities, multi-language learners, and students living below the poverty line—consistently face barriers that prevent opportunities for greater access to what they need to succeed.

MAKING EQUITABLE SCHEDULING PRACTICES ACCESSIBLE

Over the past several decades, the process of creating schedules has stayed relatively consistent, despite the availability of expansive technological platforms. This could be because policy mandates regarding graduation and university entrance requirements, teacher credential requirements, and instructional minutes have all expanded, thus complicating the nature of scheduling in large, comprehensive secondary schools. However, it is not only requirements that have increased, but also the needs of many of our students—from those with disabilities to English learners and from students with advanced academic status to those who have needs outside of the traditional academic programming—where we are falling short with our scheduling practices.

This book will provide secondary school and system leaders with tools and techniques for building transformative schedules within an individual school site or a large school system. It will support school and district teams to leverage the power of scheduling within 10-month rather than 10-year cycles. By taking stock of learning inequities and using scheduling to close equity gaps, necessary changes can be sustained over long periods of time, leading to greater academic achievement for all students.

THE INTENTION OF THE BOOK

This book is a guide to rethinking and restructuring the practice of scheduling at your secondary school and district. The goal is to provide structured opportunity for teams to do the work of considering the “why” of their scheduling practices. Using reflective questions and activities, teams can shift their mindsets and deeply consider why they do what they do and what must change for equitable scheduling practices for all students.

By considering the values, beliefs, and practices in place, teams will

- Think about the perceptions and values that define the scheduling process and reinforce the status quo.
- Think differently about what’s possible in designing schedules.

- Ask the right questions and use supportive tools.
- Shift from adult-centered to student-driven scheduling design.

The vignettes we tell are based on the decades of experience we have had in real districts with real students, teachers, and administrators. Throughout our experiences, we have witnessed a large portion of scheduling teams emphatically making decisions based on what is referred to as “student need,” but the needs and the metrics for success have not been clearly defined. Success could mean enjoyment of course topics, meeting graduation requirements, preparation for college, and/or preparing for the workforce, but how is this guaranteed for all students?

Understanding how the schedule can truly be a vehicle for altering how students are assigned teachers and grouped and whether or not they graduate high school prepared for their postsecondary lives, will put scheduling teams in the driver’s seat when it comes to creating an equitable space for each student.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND HOW IT WILL HELP

Over the years, we have seen that by using schedule assessments with a focus on equity and access, schools and districts have been able to successfully shift their practices. The work does not necessarily have to be incremental or take years to see the benefits. Indeed, by thoughtfully engaging in a cycle of improvement that seeks feedback, reflection, and joint decision making, the schedule can be personalized to meet the vision and goals of every school.

Using an inclusive, collaborative, and thoughtful process to create such a schedule for all students, schools and districts will make gains by addressing the leaky pipeline and bringing students through to graduation. The opposite holds true as well: By maintaining the traditional scheduling process with the acceptance of the results of the leaky pipeline, schools and districts will continue to reinforce inequities, something we cannot afford as a society. This does not necessarily mean that creating a schedule that best meets the needs of students, equity, and equitable practices is achieved immediately. This book reinforces the idea that the schedule is a tool for equity, one that must be partnered with the work toward best instructional and truly student-centered practices.

The topics covered and strategies provided will equip readers with the confidence and know-how to dismantle the systemic inequities that exist in the intentional or unintentional structures we build within school systems. If you are a secondary school leader trying to build a schedule aligned to your vision for learning or a district leader trying to think systematically about efforts toward meaningful graduation for all, this book is for you. Over the course of eight chapters, we will examine current scheduling constraints, highlight schools and districts attempting to address these constraints, and offer

concrete tools and artifacts that support teams in illuminating and addressing constraints in their unique contexts.

Each chapter begins with a vignette that will lift a scheduling issue and its impact on students. Chapters 3 through 8 focus specifically on developing the following changes in practice:

Changing Practice 1: Scheduling Teams Must Know the System to Change the System

Changing Practice 2: Scheduling Teams Must Design Core Sequences That Impact Equity

Changing Practice 3: Scheduling Teams Must Prioritize the Historically Marginalized

Changing Practice 4: Scheduling Teams Must Organize Strategically and Intentionally

Changing Practice 5: Scheduling Teams Must Understand How to Use Resources Strategically

Changing Practice 6: Scheduling Teams Must Structure Time and Input Intentionally

The following table illustrates the problems and consequences associated with scheduling that will be unpacked in each chapter.

| | PROBLEM | CONSEQUENCES |
|-----------|--|---|
| Chapter 1 | Students are not programmed consistently toward graduation. | Some students graduate with a transcript/diploma that leads to a postsecondary future and others do not. |
| Chapter 3 | Intentions, actions, and outcomes are not aligned and monitored in the schedule. | Despite good intentions, student group achievement gaps do not close. |
| Chapter 5 | Scheduling decisions do not prioritize historically marginalized students. | Doing the same thing each year and expecting different outcomes is insanity. Result is continued gaps in achievement by student groups. |

| | PROBLEM | CONSEQUENCES |
|-----------|---|---|
| Chapter 7 | Resource equity is not monitored in many schedules. | Classes are under-enrolled and overstaffed. The neediest students are in the largest classes with the least experienced teachers. |

The chapters in this book tackle difficult topics to change practices around traditional scheduling processes and procedures.

Chapter 1 establishes the schedule as the invisible hand of equity, outlining the theory of action from shifting mindsets to changing practices to improving actions. Scheduling teams are introduced as Architects of Equity as practice is moved from not merely logistical but to intentionally strategic.

Chapter 2 unpacks the scheduling theory of action as it guides teams to tackle the status quo and addresses personal mindsets as a prerequisite to successfully challenging current practices. The focus shifts to the idea of addressing both the technical and adaptive needs to successfully change practices.

Chapter 3 introduces the idea that scheduling teams must know the system to change the system. The power of equity assessments as a strategy for school and system transformation is revealed by showing the gaps between current reality and the ideal state.

Chapter 4 outlines the importance of establishing an Equitable Core to most impactfully bring about equity. Revision of the course of study, articulation processes, bell schedule selection, and access to advanced studies are highlighted.

Chapter 5 teaches that by shifting practices to schedule the margins first—students most often on the edges of the scheduling process, such as English learners and students with disabilities—schools can both prioritize student needs as well as produce more efficient and effective schedules.

Chapter 6 highlights the use of pathways and cohorting for strategically and intentionally organizing the schedule to maximize resources and best practices. Learning to leverage the scheduling of teachers, counselors, and support staff is a crucial skill for transformative leaders and their scheduling teams. This chapter will share tools and techniques for organizing and supporting teaching teams.

Chapter 7 examines the costs of inequitable scheduling practices and how to use resources strategically through a system of checks and balances to ensure fiscal responsibility in scheduling.

Chapter 8 provides timelines and checklists as teams begin their 10-month cycle of equitable practices using data, goals, and assessment to shift outcomes.

Finally, the epilogue emphasizes that scheduling for equity is the beginning of the work ahead toward more equitable and inclusive practices.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

If you want to understand a school's values and priorities, look at its schedule. Like sedimentary rocks, schedules can reveal where—and even why—gaps between student potential and opportunity emerge and where they begin to calcify. The purpose of this book is to provide site and school leaders with strategies to rethink the design of schedules in their schools and larger systems. This is crucial because every secondary school uses a schedule to enact their vision for learning each school year, yet they rarely alter the structure and simply roll schedules over year-to-year, too often reinforcing inequities. Interrupting schedule design with an equity focus is a moral imperative.

It is understood that not all books are to be read chronologically, sticking to the table of contents from first chapter to last. As tempting as it might be to rush to the end, we recommend going through each chapter in the order we have chosen. We believe that using the tools provided, both in the book and on the accompanying website as well as answering the reflective and self-assessment questions at the end of each chapter, your teams will be supported as you move to more equitable and sustainable scheduling processes.