

Preface

*For every complex problem there is an answer
that is clear, simple, and wrong.*

H.L. Mencken

In our combined 80+ years of working in PK–12 schools in 45 states, one factor remains clear to us: School personnel have given far more thought and attention to scheduling middle and high schools than elementary schools. Elementary schools have escaped much of the national scrutiny and the resultant criticism heaped upon secondary schools in such reports as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), *Prisoners of Time: Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning* (1994), and *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1999). While a proposed change to a high school schedule can bring out the fighting spirit of teachers, parents, students and school board members, the fact that one third grade teacher routinely instructs science far less than other third grade teachers in the same elementary school often goes unnoticed.

Sadly, it is not unusual to find elementary schools that do not even have a master schedule. Yes, most schools have a lunch schedule and schedules for physical education, art, music, and other “specials,” but too often the schedule for language arts and reading, mathematics, social studies, science, and the many sup-

port programs provided for students is constructed haphazardly by teachers working in isolation—private contractors without the global vision of the school’s mission that should guide the allocation of time and resources. Too often teachers with the most power—sometimes based on seniority, parent support of special programs, and assertive personalities—end up with preferred schedules.

Since the mid-1960s, elementary schools have added significant numbers of personnel; in one count we found that staff had increased over 50 percent. In some cases these additional resource and support personnel have been used effectively; however, we also have noted that in schools without well-crafted schedules, resource personnel are not well integrated into the instructional program and often are treated as add-ons. With this situation, support personnel compete with classroom teachers for access to students and rarely achieve their potential positive impact on student achievement.

As we have stated previously in our books on high school scheduling (Canady & Rettig, 1995) and middle school scheduling (Rettig & Canady, 2000), we continue to believe that school scheduling—high, middle, *and* elementary school scheduling—is far more important than the simple mechanical assignment of students to teachers, spaces, and time periods. Within the school schedule resides power: the power to address problems and the power to facilitate the successful implementation

of effective instructional practices. As well, those who have the responsibility for the school schedule also have the power to create confusion, to waste resources, and to cause unnecessary stress for all who work in the school.

In no way do we mean to imply that by simply implementing the scheduling strategies offered in this book that higher levels of student achievement automatically will result. Significantly increasing student achievement depends primarily on quality teaching. We can say with confidence, however, that implementation of these scheduling strategies can

- ◆ reduce fragmentation of the school day for both teachers and students;
- ◆ reduce conflict and frustration among core, support and encore teachers;
- ◆ offer equity to *all* students and teachers in the school;
- ◆ capitalize on the potential of time as a variable that can impact student achievement;
- ◆ build efficiency into the school day;
- ◆ harness the power of professional learning communities to support school improvement; and
- ◆ institutionalize generally accepted research-based principles of quality instruction including the following:
 - increasing the amount of instructional time for some subjects and/or for some students;

- reducing class size during key instructional activities;
- using formative assessment techniques to monitor students' learning; and
- providing team-based, data-driven intervention, enrichment, and tutoring services during the school day.

We believe it is important that principles of quality instruction be institutionalized into practice so they can be evaluated and changed if they are not working successfully. One way to support the institutionalization of a good practice is to build it into the schedule! Nearly all educators agree that raising expectations for students without increasing the support they receive is a recipe for failure. Similarly, increasing expectations for teachers without providing support is a formula for stress and eventual burnout. By implementing many of the scheduling strategies presented in this book we support teachers' efforts; quality instruction for *all* students is left less to chance.

The mission of elementary schools in our society has changed little over the decades; elementary school personnel seek to build basic skills in literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, the arts, wellness, democratic ideals, and civility. What has changed, however, is the realization of the importance of achieving this mission for *all* children. In our work, we have had the opportunity to visit schools across our country at all levels: elementary, middle, and high school. When we witness staggering numbers of high school students failing math and English, giving up on school because they cannot read, write,

or think mathematically, we know the roots of these problems were established earlier in their schooling. All of society pays a high price for this failure.

We believe that the elementary school is possibly the most critical institution in our society: the invisible backbone of our democracy. Of all the levels of schooling, the elementary school has the best chance of erasing the quality gap that exists for many children in terms of healthcare, parenting, and readiness to begin school. In essence, elementary schools hold the primary ticket to a better life for millions of children. Today, students who leave the elementary grades without sufficient skills to succeed in future years of schooling pose serious problems for themselves and society. The stakes are too high to allow this to continue. The goal of this book is to make elementary schools more efficient and effective for both teachers and students.

As Mencken's quote to begin this preface suggests, the solutions to the problems facing elementary schools today are complex. For that reason this was not an easy book for us to write; we began more than five years ago. We suspect, too, that a book with more than 100 schedules illustrated and explained will not be an easy book to read. For readers willing to rise to the challenge of that task, we hope you find our efforts worth your effort.

Finally, we invite your comments and suggested improvements. We, too, are still searching for ways to organize and schedule elementary schools so they can become more efficient and successful places for teaching and learning for *all* teachers and *all* students.

Lynn and Mike
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References

- Canady, R. L., & Rettig, M. D. (1995). *Block scheduling: A catalyst for change in high school*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Rettig, M. D., & Canady, R. L. (2000). *Scheduling strategies for middle schools*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (1999). *Breaking ranks: Changing an American institution*. Reston, VA: Author.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk*. Cambridge, MA: USA Research.
- National Education Commission on Time and Learning. (1994). *Prisoners of time: Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Note

The figures in this book show the school day divided into 5-minute increments. The printing process does not allow us to print the time in every 5-minute slot clearly. We do print the time each hour; times printed refer to the line to the left. The CD-ROM that accompanies this book, however, does have times printed every 5 minutes. When printed on an ink-jet or laser printer, these charts will be clear. Because many of the full-page figures have been placed at the end of each chapter, we suggest that readers consider reading the text in the book while viewing the figures on a computer to avoid flipping back and forth between text and figures.