

Howard County Public School Systems (HCPSS) High School Scheduling Best Practices: 2026-2027

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Every scheduling decision should start with a simple question: Is this what is best for students? When we lead with that mindset, we build a schedule that is truly student-centered, while still being mindful of staff needs.

Non-negotiables - things you need to know

Schedule – Time

1. Schedule will include three (3) 50-minute periods, two (2) 55-minute periods (1 and 3) and one (1) 120-minute period. Passing time between all classes is five minutes.
2. All teachers teach five (5) periods and have one (1) fifty (50) consecutive minute planning and one (1) 50-minute Program Implementation Period (PIP) four days a week and at least forty (40) consecutive minutes on the regular student day of the week with shortened class periods. In addition, they will have another ninety (90) minutes during the week, in which they will not be assigned to any other duties. No portion of the additional 90 minutes will be in blocks of less than 25 minutes.
 - a. Planning and PIP must be clearly identified on the master schedule and individual teachers' schedules.
 - b. Flipping planning and PIP periods should be infrequent and established in advance.
 - c. Changes to PIP and planning periods must not eliminate the 50 consecutive minutes for planning.
3. Teachers shall have a 30-minute, duty-free lunch period during the student day on regularly scheduled student days.
4. Any other schedule that is implemented on regular school days must not reduce teachers' planning periods (e.g., assembly schedules, incentive schedules). If needed, teachers may be excused from supervision duties during the assembly or incentive program to ensure they have 50 consecutive minutes of planning.
5. Common content PIP (consider grade 9 as appropriate) should be scheduled for teachers.
6. Flex time should be 30 minutes on Wednesdays for regularly scheduled school days.
7. When scheduling co-taught instruction, consider how many adults are assigned to co-teach in a given class period. When possible, ensure there is common planning or PIP periods for co-teachers.

Class Size

1. Maximum class size is 33 students (re: Classes with small enrollment should be closely evaluated. The gauge for this analysis is 20 students minimum per class. School leaders along with school schedulers should make careful decisions and consider the entire school program. Additional staffing requests will not be entertained when master schedules are created in such a way that limits the maximum utilization of all staff).
2. Evenly distribute students who have student support plans (IEPs, 504s, MLs and Student Support Plans) across as many sections as possible (Goal of 5-10). Critical to consider the amount of student support plans (ML, Student Engagement, 504) in each classroom. This certainly depends on staffing available, but these should be considerations. Check numbers of support plans throughout the scheduling process and summer. (Pro tip: have a spreadsheet of students with plans and when a schedule change is needed, any change is recommended to go through one person (ie. scheduling AP, special ed admin or counselor ITL)).

Things to think about

Prior to beginning build considerations:

Course Requests

- All students have a full schedule of requests (7 credits)
 - Generate the OSM602 Student Request Exception report to find students who do not have enough credits requested (data clerk can run regularly for counselors)
- Generate the OSM601 Course Request Totals report in Synergy regularly and share out with teachers/stakeholders (Daily or weekly - depends on your school)
 - This report tells you how many requests (primary and alternate) for each course-take lowest number of sections
 - Consider delegating the run to data clerk - come up with a system for communication
- Meet with all current 10th and 11th graders first to prioritize ARL requests. Look at the [articulation calendar](#) for dates of when requests need to be in Synergy.

Building the Master Schedule

- Consider not splitting 4th period schedules for staff (both planning or both teaching). However, this can be limiting to the master schedule.
- Be aware of duty schedules and PIP needs.
- Pro tip: consider singletons and electives for period 4.
- Science, PE, Health, Dance, Art, Theatre are recommended to be in period 4. At least one core 9th grade course will need to be on block.
- Assessed regular courses - try not to put it on the block.
- Classes with multiple sections should be spread throughout as many periods as possible. Consider a greater number of classes in period 3 and 5.
- Consider collapsing courses based on student numbers throughout the scheduling process. This should be done early and/or prior to when counselors are meeting with students and prior to staffing.

- [Use ITLs](#) to help create a google doc for conflicts - Have ITLs talk across departments and cross level teams to discuss things like: classes that can't be on the same block (ie. Wind Ensemble).
 - Pro tip: Leadership Meetings and Scheduling Retreat –
 - [Scheduling Retreat Guidelines SAMPLE](#)
 - Teacher Feedback Form – [Wish List for Teachers to fill out](#)
 - Or create a '[scheduling team](#)' (principal, scheduling AP, data clerk, counselor) to collect feedback from each department to give them a voice (ie. what do you want? What worked? What did not work?) Consider a dept meeting and/or google doc. Sometimes teachers don't feel comfortable advocating for a course if a colleague has taught for a long time, so give options for them to inquire. Sample [Department Input Spreadsheet](#)
- When building, start with Special Education and multilingual learner students' service hours and co-taught needs as dictated by plans. There isn't a great report for this data so consider a spreadsheet with hours from your special ed and ML team leaders. You can use a report in Tienet - School Services Report- Locate your school in the Organizational Location Filter as a resource. You will most likely load these students into the schedule first.
- Consider how you are building the foundation - Gen ed, special ed or ML? Make sure you are spreading resources across grade levels and periods. See class size section #2 above.
 - You want multiple levels in the same period so level changes can happen (allows for level changes more easily).
- AM/PM ARL - 11th graders take classes in the morning (pd 1, 2) at ARL and 12th graders are PM (pd 4B, 5, 6)
- When building sections, label co-taught sections (special education support) (ie. 2T or "sup" for support) or a unique designation. This helps counselors identify those classes and make sure students who need co-taught support (example LA-400-1-2T)
- Be sure to put semesterized classes (ie. PE, Social Studies, etc.) during the same periods, but with different terms. Students enrolled in required .5 classes like health need another class to go into the alternate semester. Consider creating concurrent semester and full-year courses when possible (ie. full year and semester of weights in same period)

Once counselors begin meeting with students, run these regularly to see up-to-date requests - daily as you can. Consider collaborating with your data clerk to streamline.

- OSM416: Sections Needed By Requests '
 - how many requests you have for each course and the number sections you'll need of each course - used for Staffing - Colbi Dorman generates this report too
- OSM601: Course Request Totals - consider regular share with teachers/stakeholders.
 - how many requests (primary and alternate) for each course- err on the side of taking the lowest number of sections rather than the highest (ie. 60 requests - run 2 sections rather than 3)
- OSM602: Student Request Exception report
 - to find students who do not have enough credits requested
- OSM605: Period load staff report (after you build the schedule).

- How many students in each grade
- How many seats you have in each period for each grade
- How many students were scheduled in each period by grade
- Useful in highlighting periods where more sections are needed

Staffing

- Plan on having a committable schedule by early April
 - Depending on how budget conversations are looking, consider having a back up schedule with bare minimum

Course Variances

High school course offerings must be in accordance with the High School Catalog. If a school would like to run a course not listed in the catalog or a variation of a course, school administrators must submit a course variance form for approval by the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

To complete the course variance, this [course variance form](#) link will allow you to make a copy of the variance form. Retitle the google document to include your school name. Once you complete the form, share the google doc with the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment and the Specialist for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, as noted on the bottom of the google doc.

Curriculum Specific Expectations:

- Reading Specialists:
 - Reading specialists should be assigned 1.0 to the Reading Program and not split with other content areas.
 - Reading specialists should only be teaching Strategic Reading classes and co-teaching with content teachers when possible.
 - All staffing placements and changes should be made in collaboration with the K-12 Reading Intervention, Access, and Opportunity Office.
- ELD:
 - ELD teachers should be assigned 1.0 to the ELD Program and not split with other content areas.
 - ELD teachers should only be assigned to teach ELD classes and/or co-taught content classes containing MLs.
 - Two ELD staff members (teachers and/or paras) should not be assigned to teach within the same class.
 - All staffing placements and changes should be made in collaboration with the K-12 ELD Office.
- Health and Physical Education: When possible, teachers should be teaching health or physical education.
- Special Education:
 - Special education staff should be assigned to a class, **only** to support IEP implementation.
 - Special education teachers can be assigned to teach a reading seminar if they have received the training to implement reading intervention.

- **Multiple Preps in One Section:**
 - For any staff member assigned more than three course preps or multiple instructional levels within the same section, the principal will meet with the teacher to collaboratively identify targeted supports intended to reduce the instructional workload associated with the assignment. The intent is to prioritize support for staff with the most complex instructional responsibilities.
 - Examples of possible supports may include, but are not limited to:
 - Temporary exemptions from PIP duty (non professional learning) or similar supervisory assignments
 - Examples include: non-instructional duties such as lunch duty or committee assignments
 - Adjustments that create protected opportunities for co-planning or shared resource development
 - Other school based operational or logistical supports, identified in collaboration with the principal and teacher, that reduce non instructional workload demands
 - *These supports are intended to be responsive to individual staff needs and are not intended to be professional development based.*

Helpful Reports

Synergy:

- [Synergy Page with recommended reports](#)
- CHS202: Graduation Requirements Check (individual students)
- [Identification of Active MLs](#)
- [Identification of MLs for Co-Taught Instruction](#)

Tienet:

- School Services Report: use the dropdown Organizational Location Filter to locate your school

Suggested Timeline

In addition to the articulation calendar, this timeline is for scheduling specific items.

Dates	Topic	What to do
June		Book space for parent night for December/Jan
Oct		Download Articulation Calendar and discuss school specific dates <i>Set Notifications in the Articulation</i>

		<i>Document so you know when items change or information is added</i>
Early November	OOD JROTC Applications	*If you have OOD JROTC Students - Develop plan and communicate OOD JROTC application process for families and feeders
Mid- November	Staff Meeting/Newsletter	Inform teachers about the Recommendation Process. Provide timeline to staff (Usually recs start 1st week Dec)
Early Dec		Recommendation Window Opens in Synergy for Teachers
Mid December - Mid February Done by the time counselors meet with students	Tutorial requests	Special Ed ITLs and case managers make recommendations for students for next year (Yearlong or Semester) in a spreadsheet - communicate with middle schools to get rising 9th grade IEP tutorial needs
Early January	Spreadsheet w/ service hours for IEPs	Discuss with Special Ed ITL and develop a spreadsheet of all students with IEPs - list service hours/co-teaching needs by subject. Consider adding ML needs, student with support plans, and 504s
Mid December (before window opens)	FlexTime 1	Deliver to students - Course Request Process before window opens
Mid December/January	FlexTime 2 (Elective Fair)	Once window opens - Consider offering a Course Request Entry / Elective Fair for students
Mid-Late Dec. / Early Jan	Evening	Scheduling Night for ALL students. Special session for rising 9th (should have booked space in summer)
Starting January	School Admin Meetings	Add a standing agenda item to review scheduling in admin meetings
Fine Arts Auditions Numbers	Scheduled by each school	Early is better. The more info you have (volume of interest), the better for prepping fine arts numbers
January after midterms	Teacher feedback on schedule	Administrators - get individual feedback on the schedule, what they are interested in teaching. Consider

		including in ITL or leadership meetings, departmental lunches or after school meetings.
Early in the counselor meeting window		ARL Numbers pulled by ARL. Counselors need to meet with rising 10th first to ensure requests are made before numbers are pulled. 11th graders need to be shortly thereafter.
When counselors are meeting with kids	Continue running Synergy Scheduling Reports and monitor	
See artic deadline for mid-feb date	Full schedules	Prior to full schedules due, make sure all kids have full schedules for admin review - week prior to window closing for school counselors to meet with students. This includes students intending to take jumpstart courses.
Late Feb	ITL review	Think about: Do you include ITLs in the discussion and problem solving? Try to be as transparent as you can, but make sure people are clear you are the decision maker. Also ensure people know that things will change. Admin shares draft schedule with ITLs for feedback and thoughts. Who is building draft schedules for departments? Are ITLs supporting and involved, or are you deciding? Review the conflict matrix across departments.
Late Feb	Look at potential conflicts	Use ITLs to help create a google doc for conflicts - communication across ITLs and cross level teams - classes that can't be on the same block (ie. Wind Ensemble) and/or run OSM407
Late March/early April	Voluntary transfer window closes	Finalize the draft of the content schedule prior to transfer deadline (if you know courses with confidence, share if you can so staff can make informed decisions about leaving or needing to leave). Consult with principal about conversations.
Mid/Late March (see arctic calendar)	Surplus letters	Ask for volunteers for surplus, then Prep Surplus letters. After staffing, send letters to surplus staff - link to

		Colbi's documents Staffing Timeline in preparation for SY2026-27.pdf
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