SUNDAY MORNING TELEVISION is peppered with political news programs. Each one has its round-table of experts who take either the liberal or conservative side of political issues, and sometimes these discussions can be volatile. Now think about if we replace these political pundits with librarians; no doubt, you would also get a lively and even volatile discussion on library issues. These issues can also have a spectrum of liberal or conservative viewpoints, and one of those issues sure to cause some of the liveliest discussion is the scheduling of the school library.

While mostly seen as an elementary issue, the library schedule can also be important for K-12 libraries and for those middle school and high school librarians who do double duty by also teaching a course. Just as those pundits on television believe they have the right answers to the problem, school librarians have strong opinions about scheduling. And, just like the pundits who have no control over various issues, often the school librarian has no control over the schedule either.

IMPORTANCE OF SCHEDULES

The schedule is important because it determines access—access to the librarian, to the materials in the library, and to the facility. Students and staff should have access to all three at the point of need.

The question becomes how that is best accomplished. The answer can be very complicated.

There are various types of schedules on the spectrum to consider: fixed schedule, flexible schedule, and a hybrid. For the purpose of this article, we’re going to generalize the three types of schedules with the following definitions:
Fixed schedule: The librarian sees each class for a certain amount of time each week. Typically, this includes time for circulation and instruction.

Flexible schedule: There are no set times for checkout and instruction. The librarian works with classes on an “as-needed” basis. Students are free to check out materials anytime from the library.

Hybrid: There is a combination of fixed and flexible scheduling. Most of the time a hybrid is a flexible schedule for instruction and a fixed schedule for checkout. However, there are endless possibilities with the hybrid model.

So, as we break down the schedule spectrum, let’s take a trip around the library pundit round table with these three models.

ACCESS TO THE COLLECTION

Fixed: With this model, classes go to the library on a set schedule once a week to check out materials. The only time they can check out materials is during this slot. Typically, the classroom teacher is not present during checkout. Also, this time is often connected with library instruction. The fixed model is most heavily used to provide teacher planning time during the school day. The library is scheduled much like other specials areas of art, music, and physical education. This schedule guarantees that every student is checking out every week (or every few days). However, students often can’t come throughout the week, even if they run out of materials.

Flexible: With this model, classes (or students) go to the library to check out new materials whenever they want. They can actually go to the library multiple times in the same day, if needed. Typically, the classroom teacher is present during checkout and is often out mingling among the students helping them to locate materials. The flexible model typically separates circulation from library instruction. One advantage is that it is very easy to adjust the schedule based on such events as holidays, assemblies, and specials events. The teacher is also present to help guide students based on their needs. While that is also a pro, it can be a con if teachers are limiting what students can check out. If the librarian is teaching or helping other students, the teacher can be an added set of hands to help circulation run smoothly (operating the automation system, helping students, etc.).

Hybrid: With this model, there are all kinds of options. One possibility would be that students have a fixed time each week to go to the library and check out books as a class. But, there can also be open times in the schedule where students can check out if they need additional resources before their next scheduled visit. The pro is that this approach offers a consistent time, but at the same time gives access if students need additional resources. The con is that students cannot access the library resources if that additional time doesn’t fit with the teacher’s schedule.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- While very few libraries are totally digital, how do eBooks fit into the equation for determining schedules?
- Is the teacher planning time connected with library instruction? The fixed class is not scheduled, or perhaps by having an assistant cover the fixed time while the librarian is free to provide instruction at the point of need. (The librarian prepares materials that the assistant uses to cover the fixed time.) The fixed class does not have the teacher present, but during the “open times” for point-of-need instruction, the teacher is present and actively participating.

INSTRUCTION

Perhaps the most important role of the school librarian is working with students. How might that best be scheduled?

Fixed: With this model, the librarian is providing instruction at the point of need for students. The teacher and the librarian have co-planned, will co-teach, and often co-assess the work of students. Students often will come for multiple visits in consecutive days for instruction and to work on an assigned project. This allows for a class to focus on a project and complete it in a timely manner. Depending on space and staffing, the librarian can juggle between multiple classes scheduled in the library or provide instruction in the classroom as well. The librarian is much more available to accommodate classes on an as-needed basis.

Flexible: With this model, the librarian is providing instruction at the point of need for students. The teacher and the librarian see each class for a certain amount of time each week for instruction, but the librarian can also provide instruction at the point of need. This can be accomplished by having “open times” in the schedule when a fixed class is not scheduled, or perhaps by having an assistant cover the fixed time while the librarian is free to provide instruction at the point of need. (The librarian prepares materials that the assistant uses to cover the fixed time.) The fixed class does not have the teacher present, but during the “open times” for point-of-need instruction, the teacher is present and actively participating.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Does instruction and circulation have to be connected?
- How can it be ensured that instruction in the library con-
nects to what is happening in the classroom?
▶ If the teacher is not part of the planning, delivering, and assessing, how can communication be maintained between the librarian and the classroom teacher?
▶ How can it be ensured that all students have the opportunity to work with the librarian?
▶ How is the librarian part of planning and curriculum design if he/she is working with fixed classes all day?

FACILITIES
School librarians operate one of the largest spaces in the school. It is, therefore, natural that there may be opportunities to utilize the facility beyond instruction and circulation.
▶ Fixed: With this model, the librarian is responsible for the library. Because they are responsible for the children they are instructing, they are unable to supervise independent users or other groups. The library is the librarian’s classroom, so they are utilizing the space available. Likely there is not room or the option for other groups to utilize the space.
▶ Flexible: With this model, the librarian is free to provide instruction and work with students anywhere, so it is possible that he/she is in the classrooms or other spaces, which means the library story area or instructional area could be available for others to use. For example, a GoogleCalendar could be used for each space. The librarian would reserve the space when he/she is using it for instruction, but otherwise it would be available for others. Guest speakers, classes needing tables to spread out materials, or just a different place to work could all utilize the library space. Other educators who want to work with small groups could also utilize space in the library if it is not being used.
▶ Hybrid: Likely, the library is full in this model, but there could be opportunities for the facility to be used by others in the school day, too. It really will vary greatly depending on just what type of hybrid scheduling is being utilized.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER:
▶ What is the size of the library? Are there opportunities for multiple things to be happening at once?
▶ What “spaces” are there? For example, is there a story area, instructional areas, conference rooms? How can that space best be utilized?
▶ How is scheduling handled for the spaces that are available for others to use? Would a GoogleCalendar work?
▶ Should the library facility have other uses?

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES
Librarians can find useful information on scheduling in the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) position statement on scheduling (http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/position-statements/flex-sched). In addition, material is also provided in Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs, which also has comments on access to the librarian, the collection, and the facility.

So, for those who have been around the field for a while, what’s new here? The debate surrounding these scheduling issues has been going on for some time. But as plans are considered for the school libraries of the future, it is important to take time to review scheduling: where we are, where we’ve been, and where we’re going in the future.

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What is the best type of schedule? I certainly have my opinions (and usually not afraid to share them), but I’ll refrain from writing them down today. Instead, I think you and your administrators need to take some time to do a study yourself. Read what has been published about library schedules. Talk about how the collections, facility, and, most importantly, the school librarian can be maximized throughout the school year. Have a conversation about how the library program can be scheduled to meet the best needs of students and staff. My gut says that these discussions will result in the right plan for the situation at hand, and amazing things will be happening in the school library.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

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