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DMGROUP IN ACTION

# Creating Effective Remote Elementary Schedules

*Five Emerging Practices*

*by Hallie Ventling*

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# DMGroup in Action

## Creating Effective Remote Elementary Schedules

### *Five Emerging Practices*

Hallie Ventling

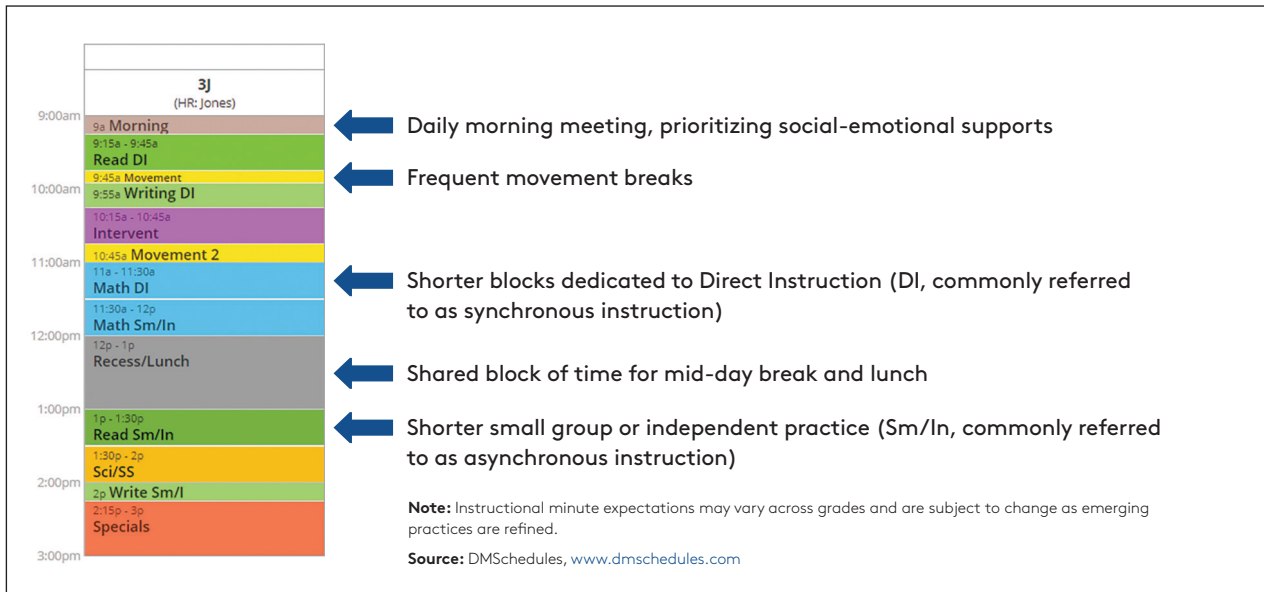
**T**his past spring, schools were faced with the challenge of quickly pivoting to a fully remote, distance-learning environment with little time to prepare or transition. During the 2020-2021 school year, we are anticipating that regardless of how the school year started, districts may need to quickly shift between different models (fully remote, hybrid, and fully in-person models) in response to changes in local COVID-19 infection rates. To help districts prepare, District Management Group is sharing five key emerging practices for creating effective remote elementary schedules.



### **1** Schedule dedicated time for targeted social-emotional supports, including a daily synchronous morning meeting block and short breaks for guided movement

Social-emotional learning continues to be a top priority, especially as many students may be experiencing isolation, depression, economic and food insecurity, and lack of motivation due to the pandemic. When preparing remote schedule scenarios, consider adding breaks throughout the day. Scheduled and dedicated time for breaks and check-ins can help students focus and engage more fully during instructional or independent work time. Examples include but are not limited to the following:

- Add a buffer time before synchronous/“live” instructional blocks to help minimize technology delays during transitions



- Create a routine with dedicated blocks for movement to support the mental and physical health and well-being of students; for example:
  - Provide families and caregivers with mindfulness tips
  - Share activity, fitness, or movement videos
  - Coordinate virtual “live” recesses with PE teachers or other school leaders
- Schedule one-on-one check-ins for homeroom teachers to connect with each of their students to help build connections and check on each student’s overall health and well-being

## 2 Schedule shorter instructional blocks with a focus on direct instruction in the morning and follow up with small group or independent practice in the afternoon

When creating remote schedules, developmentally appropriate durations for instruction should be clearly defined. The attention span and engagement of students working independently and primarily on computers will be different from those of students in a traditional classroom setting. Consider shortening blocks and adding more breaks throughout the day to help students maintain focus and stay on task while remote.

Many schools utilizing DMSchedules to build their fully remote schedules are scheduling 20 to 30 minutes of synchronous instruction for each subject in the mornings and then scheduling separate 15-to-30 minute blocks of asynchronous independent or small group instruction for each subject.

## 3 Schedule common lunch and recess time across all grades and schools to provide additional collaboration opportunities for teachers

A key emerging practice for virtual schedules includes a shared, minimum of one-hour (e.g. noon to 1 pm) lunch and recess. Teachers can leverage this shared time to check in with other administrators, teachers, or students to prepare for the second half of the day. For schools implementing practice #2 above — providing a shorter than usual direct instructional block in the morning and an additional block in the afternoon for small group or

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independent work — a common mid-day break can serve as a time to troubleshoot any concerns, shift students into different small groups, and target any necessary remediation or enrichment in the latter half of the day.

## 4 Consider a different approach to specials (art, music, PE)

Many schools are also opting to shift how other instruction, such as specials, occurs. In spring 2020, teachers and families felt that receiving multiple specials (art, music, PE) each week was challenging, requiring students to do a lot of juggling and transitioning. One solution is for a single homeroom to receive the same special for an extended duration (e.g. several weeks) and then rotate to the next special. The time devoted to each special may vary based on the number of specials available in your building. A common specials rotation is six weeks, but quarterly rotations or trimester rotations may also be applicable. This approach can help students engage with the content on a deeper level and form stronger connections with teachers, ease staffing demands, and simplify grading.

## 5 Set clear schedule expectations for families and students, and foster open communication and flexibility to ease transitions

Clear and consistent communication can build your community's confidence and help set expectations. This basic truth is applicable regarding shifts in schedules and scheduling practices. These difficult times may require schools to manage and move between multiple schedules over the course of the year. Effective communication will ease schedule transitions and reduce the hours you and your staff spend responding to questions and concerns.

Even before circumstances demand schedule changes, such as a transition from remote to hybrid, the following steps are important:

- Provide information at the same regular intervals (e.g. weekly, biweekly) and, if possible, on the same day of the week so families and caregivers understand the tempo of communication
- Share the resources available for families and students in every communication (e.g. student assignment pages, COVID policy, remote student support FAQs, etc.)
- Outline any changes in learning modality, duration, breaks, etc., in order to set expectations (e.g. synchronous vs. asynchronous instruction, check-in points for parents)
- Before implementing schedule changes, send a communication to the parent/guardian and request acknowledgment that it has been received (e.g. teacher emails parents and requests digital confirmation)
- Clearly identify tools (e.g. survey, feedback channels) to efficiently centralize, review, and troubleshoot concerns

Adjusting to a remote model is challenging for students, teachers, parents, and administrators alike. But emerging practices such as these are helping to make remote learning and remote teaching more effective and more manageable. ♦

### DMSchedules

DMGroup and our DMSchedules team work with hundreds of schools across the country and seek to share the best emerging practices that we encounter. Do you have virtual practices that are working well in your elementary school? Email us at [scheduling@dmgroupk12.com](mailto:scheduling@dmgroupk12.com) to share.

If you want to explore any of these ideas further or see how DMSchedules can help you put these practices into action, contact us at [scheduling@dmgroupk12.com](mailto:scheduling@dmgroupk12.com) or visit us at [dmschedules.com](https://dmschedules.com).