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DMGROUP IN ACTION

Elementary Scheduling Made Easy for Minnehaha Academy (MN)

by Craig Gibbons and Hallie Ventling

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*- Libby Burton
Lower School,
Dean of Students*

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Elementary Scheduling Made Easy for Minnehaha Academy (MN)

Strategic Elementary School Schedules with DMGroup's Software

Craig Gibbons and Hallie Ventling

Libby Burton, Lower School Dean of Students at Minnehaha Academy, scanned with satisfaction the array of schedules she had created for the upcoming academic year. In past years, creating the elementary schedules had been frustrating — Burton would end up struggling for weeks with imperfect tools to balance competing priorities within a variety of constraints. This year, Burton had decided to try something new: she had heard about scheduling software created by District Management Group (DMGroup) and had decided to give it a try. She purchased the software-only option and it exceeded her expectations. Burton found the software to be user-friendly and well-supported; she was able to create the master schedule as well as staff schedules with ease. Teachers and staff were actually complimenting her on how well she had incorporated and balanced the school's priorities.

A Small School with a Highly Complex Schedule

Minnehaha Academy is a high-performing, private, religious PK-12 school located in the heart of Minneapolis, Minnesota. In the lower school (PK-5), each grade has sections of approximately 19 to 24 students, but the schedule is unique and complex. Both the master schedule and the



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schedule for specials (music, art, PE, Spanish, Innovation, etc.) operate on a six-day cycle; specials offerings vary in their frequency and duration and have specific placement constraints (*Exhibit 1*). For example, some specials occur once per six-day cycle, while others occur twice per six-day cycle; some last 45 minutes, while others last as long as 60 or 75 minutes. And some specials have particular requirements; for example, music and Spanish need to occur back-to-back, and Innovation needs to be scheduled on three consecutive days.

FAST FACTS



Grades:
PK-5

Total Students:
257

Students of Color:
30%

Faculty Holding Advanced Degrees:
2/3



“*Burton was able to automatically generate schedules for specific staff, such as homeroom teachers and specials teachers.*”

To balance so many priorities and constraints, Burton had been using spreadsheets and a variety of other tools, but none of these were built for scheduling or suited to handling this degree of complexity. Burton typically built the master schedule by herself. She would create individual spreadsheet tabs for homeroom teachers, specials teachers, and other staff groups, and painstakingly build their schedules in five-minute increments, switching between tabs to ensure that none of the schedules conflicted with the others and that all of the scheduling requirements and constraints were met. If anything needed to change, she had to review each sheet, identify any dependencies, and manually keep all spreadsheets in sync. She wished there were a better way.

Seeking Scheduling Expertise

Burton had heard about DMGroup’s scheduling software and best-practices research and decided to reach out to learn more. She was reassured by their initial conversation as DMGroup’s scheduling experts were familiar with virtually all of Burton’s priorities and challenges. She found the following features of the cloud-based software particularly compelling:

- School and schedule constraints are entered up front and are honored as schedules are created (i.e., visual aids and built-in validations help ensure that scheduling rules are adhered to)

Exhibit 1 REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHEDULING MINNEHAHA ACADEMY’S LOWER SCHOOL SPECIALS OFFERINGS

| Special | Minutes | Times in Rotation | Notes |
|-------------------------|---------|-------------------|---|
| PE | 45 min | 2 | Cannot be scheduled on consecutive days |
| Art | 75 min | 1 | |
| Innovation (grades 3-5) | 60 min | 1 | Must be scheduled on 3 consecutive days |
| Info lab (grades K-2) | 60 min | 1 | |
| Music | 45 min | 2 | Must be scheduled back-to-back with Spanish |
| Spanish | 45 min | 2 | Must be scheduled back-to-back with Music |

Source: Minnehaha Academy.

- Unique scheduling needs can be accommodated as the software supports having different schedules by day
- Various schedule rotation models can be accommodated (e.g., including Minnehaha's six-day schedule rotations for both the master and specials cycle)
- Periods are customizable: e.g., period duration can be changed with ease and adjusted based upon grade level or day
- User-friendly drag-and-drop scheduling blocks make scheduling quick and easy
- Various scenarios can be created with ease, making it easy to experiment with different options
- Individual schedules are automatically generated for each grade, homeroom teacher, and specials teacher
- Schedules all work together and scheduling conflicts are prevented
- Schedule sharing feature allows all invitees to view all designated schedules

And, the software-only option was \$900, which sounded more than reasonable to Burton if it indeed could achieve all that was promised.

Creating an Elementary Master Schedule Aligned with School Goals

In June 2019, Burton purchased the license for DMGroup's Elementary Scheduling cloud-based software, and immediately found it to be straightforward and easy to use.

- **Setup**

In the "Setup" step, Burton entered basic information about the schedule such as start and end times, lunch requirements and constraints, guidelines, schedule type, and specials rotation. While the software was thorough, it was also customizable; Burton was easily able to add periods for chapel, enrichment, and free play for Kindergarten, for example.

- **Scheduling around resource and facility constraints**

In keeping with DMGroup's scheduling best practices, the software is designed to begin by scheduling around resource and facility constraints, i.e. scheduling specials, lunch, and recess first. Given the many constraints Minnehaha Academy's lower school had regarding the scheduling of specials, Burton called in for support. DMGroup's scheduling experts guided her, making sure all specials fit within parameters. Minnehaha's constraints were complex, but DMGroup was on call to help navigate these challenges.

- **Scheduling ELA, Math, Intervention/Enrichment, and other blocks by dragging and dropping**

Burton could view the sections of every grade (K-5) on the master scheduling screen. The schedule blocks for specials, lunch, and recess were clearly displayed in the master schedule. It was easy for Burton to understand her options. She even enjoyed dragging and dropping the core instructional blocks into the schedule and experimenting with different scenarios.

Burton was amazed at how quickly and easily she had been able to create the master schedule. "The DMGroup scheduling tool saved me a ton of time," she said. Instead of the usual frustration, she actually found the process enjoyable. In fact, using the scheduling tool and working with DMGroup's experts also had the benefit of prompting Burton to think about the schedule in new ways. For example, teacher common planning time was always a priority but was challenging to schedule. DMGroup's support helped Burton consider new ways to group grade levels together and provide common planning time opportunities at least a few days in the cycle.

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Teachers and staff were actually complimenting Burton on how well she had incorporated and balanced the school's priorities.

Scheduling Success

By August, the schedules were complete. The schedules accommodated and balanced Minnehaha Academy’s priorities and scheduling constraints, and were ready to be shared with staff. In prior years, Burton had had to build the master schedule and then create each individual schedule. With DMGroup’s software, once the master schedule was created, Burton was able to automatically generate schedules for specific staff, such as homeroom teachers and specials teachers. With a push of a button, she could generate the following schedules:

- Grade-level schedules
- Individualized homeroom teacher schedules
- Individualized specials teacher schedules
- Specials rotation schedule

The “Share” feature allowed Burton to grant sharing of schedules among staff. Authorized staff could easily navigate to the current version of their schedule for any day of the cycle (*Exhibit 2*). Teachers and colleagues appreciated the ability to see the master schedule, their own schedule, and those of their colleagues. They were thrilled with the results and complimented Burton on how well she had incorporated and balanced the school’s priorities.

Burton was extremely pleased with the results of the scheduling software. It had been very easy and the results were all positive. She found herself looking forward to the opportunity to use her new scheduling knowledge, skills, and tools to open the door to further improvements and successful implementation of school priorities when creating the Minnehaha lower school schedule for the following year. ♦

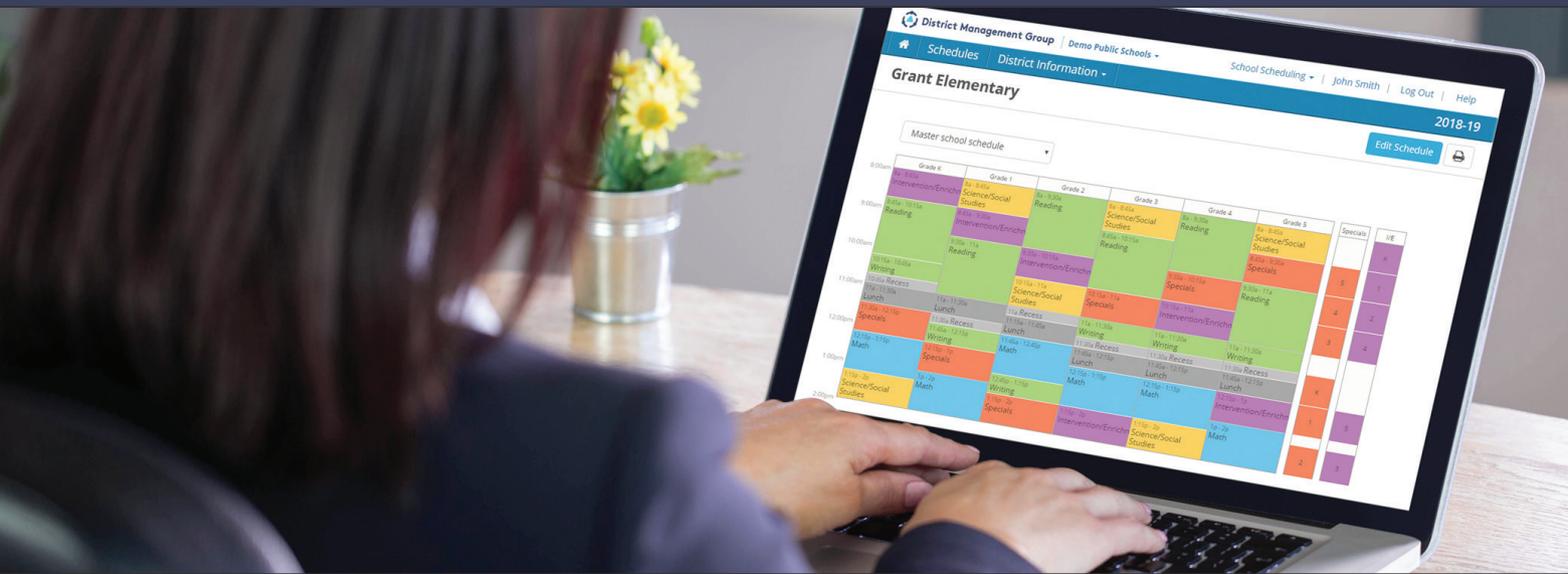
Exhibit 2 DMGROUP SCHEDULING SOFTWARE ALLOWED MINNEHABA ACADEMY STAFF TO VIEW SPECIFIC SCHEDULES FOR ANY DAY IN THE 6-DAY CYCLE

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Source: Minnehaha Academy and DMGroup.

Scheduling for Success

DMGroup's Elementary Scheduling Solution



Realize **scheduling best practices** to make the most of your school day to better support students.



Build better schedules with DMGroup's Elementary Scheduling Solution which includes:

- **Software for Elementary Master Scheduling**
- **Professional Development on Scheduling Best Practices**
- **Implementation Support**



District Management Group

Helping Schools and Students Thrive

Join the thousands of leaders that DMGroup has already helped to leverage schedules strategically to improve equity, raise student outcomes, and achieve more of their learning goals. Contact us today and start *Scheduling for Success*.

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