

## Five Secrets to Operationalize Deeper Learning

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High school leaders across the country are adopting deeper learning pedagogy, curriculum, and assessments. This is encouraging and will undoubtedly contribute to greater outcomes for young people. But while the academics are starting to line up, the operational practices often fall short of supporting long-term success. Sustainable Deeper Learning transformations must include structural and functional shifts as well, to ensure that teachers and students reap maximum benefits from change and improvement efforts. As COO for Envision Schools and Executive Director for Envision Learning Partners, I see five clear operational shifts that help Deeper Learning flourish in any high school environment:

### 1. **Invest in an advisory period:**

Advisories, when done well, are the HQ for student projects, portfolios, and defenses. Students not only get coaching and support from their advisor; they also have an important and intentional space for peer-to-peer support and coaching. This is a critical element of learning how to revise, collaborate, and reflect.

### 2. **Shift to block periods:**

In-depth performance tasks take time. Why is it that we expect students to master coursework in 70-minute daily chunks versus the asymmetrical schedule of the working world? By giving students *and* teachers the longer block to go deep, you ensure immersive lessons that transform learning. Longer blocks open up possibilities for teachers and students that will never emerge in the traditional shorter block schedule.

### 3. **Organize teacher collaboration in grade-level teams:**

Classic subject-area departments run the risk of reinforcing teacher silos. Grade-level teams, on the other hand, support an interdisciplinary, collaborative, student-centered approach to teaching. Teachers can better focus on students' developmental needs and share important information with each other about each student's progress, social-emotional status, and unique needs and talents. They can combine efforts and enrich their own disciplines by designing projects that integrate multiple content areas and aligning their assessments.

### 4. **Build in flex days for demonstrations of learning:**

Whether it is an exhibition, portfolio defense, or an expedition, flex days are crucial to create the time and space for the full-realization of any Deeper Learning effort. Flex days serve as benchmark moments to assess the depth of student learning, build and celebrate community, and add variety to the marathon school year. They provide both teachers and students structured ways to assess, reflect, and get inspired for what's next.

### 5. **Develop a low-budget online document-management system:**

Online tools are ubiquitous. In a Deeper Learning context, teachers need to dialogue with students through shared documents, asynchronously collaborate with fellow staff, track student progress, and create repositories of student work. While there can be advantages to implementing a full scale learning management system, teachers can spend a few weeks in the summer building an effective architecture and protocols using free online platforms.

While perhaps not the sexiest strategies to emerge from school design efforts, each of these ideas goes a long way towards supporting and sustaining a Deeper Learning school transformation.

### **The Growing Deeper Learning Community Can Help**

The good news is that models of these strategies in action exist: if you're interested in seeing first hand how a school or network can operationalize Deeper Learning, talk to your colleagues, reach out to authors on this blog, and find a school near you to visit and learn from. Students all over the country can only benefit from this kind of collaboration and growth.

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