DMT COMPANION

Insight 40 · 2026 · for teachers, coaches, and school leaders

TIME MATTERS: A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS, COACHES, AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Using instructional time to support mathematical thinking

How to Use This

This Companion provides questions for teachers, instructional coaches, and school leaders to examine how they allocate and use mathematics time. Start with the three questions that follow.

> **Key Idea • Sufficient instructional time provides opportunities for students to develop mathematical ideas, connect representations, and become more fluent with procedures. How teachers use that time matters just as much.**

Three Guiding Questions

Answer these before you read the Insight, then again afterward.

1. **How many minutes of core mathematics do students in your school receive each day, and how consistent is that time?**
2. **In a typical lesson, how much of the time do students spend investigating, discussing, and practicing mathematics?**
3. **Does intervention supplement students' core mathematics instruction, or does it replace part of that instruction?**

Daily Mathematics Time: DMTI Planning Recommendations

Research supports the importance of sufficient opportunities to learn mathematics, but it does not establish a single number of instructional minutes that guarantees achievement. The required time depends on the mathematical content, students' prior knowledge, instructional organization, and opportunities for practice and discussion. The ranges below are DMTI planning recommendations, not research thresholds.

Grade band	DMTI planning recommendation	Purpose
Grades K–2	70–90 minutes daily	Working with models, discussing quantities, and building number relationships
Grades 3–5	60–75 minutes daily	Solving problems, comparing strategies, and connecting representations to procedures
Grades 6–8	50–70 minutes daily	Reasoning with more abstract content and formalizing ideas

This time is for students' mathematical work: investigating, discussing, and practicing. It is not intended for longer periods of teacher talk.

Organizing a Lesson

Lesson organization should reflect what mathematics students are learning. Teachers may need different amounts of time for investigation, discussion, explicit instruction, and practice. The table describes common parts of a lesson without fixed minutes. Not every lesson includes every part, and the order can change.

Part of the lesson	Purpose	When it may need more time
Recall	Students retrieve prior learning the lesson builds on.	When the lesson depends on an idea students have not used recently
Launch	Students understand the task and the question it asks.	When the context or representation is new
Investigation	Students work on the mathematics, often with a partner or small group.	When students are developing a new relationship or strategy
Discussion	Students share, compare, and connect strategies.	When strategies differ, or a key relationship needs to be made explicit.
Explicit instruction	The teacher names the relationship or procedure and connects it to students' work.	When students need a more efficient procedure or new notation
Practice	Students apply the idea and build fluency.	When students need additional practice to strengthen understanding, accuracy, and efficiency
Check	Students show what they understand.	When the next lesson depends on the evidence

> **Key Idea • Discussion gives students opportunities to compare strategies, explain mathematical relationships, and connect their work to the ideas being developed.**

For Teachers

Teachers decide how they use time in a lesson. Plan the lesson around the mathematical relationship students are learning, then decide how much time investigation, discussion, explicit instruction, and practice will need. For example, a lesson on equivalent fractions may need more time for students to partition and compare models before the class formalizes a procedure.

Questions to consider:

- What mathematical relationship is this lesson designed to develop?
- Which part of the lesson will need the most time today, and why?
- Is there time for students to compare strategies before the lesson ends?
- How will students revisit this idea in the days and weeks that follow?

For Coaches

Coaches can help teachers examine how they use instructional time. Observing a lesson with attention to time often shows where the opportunities for reasoning occur and where they are cut short.

Questions to consider:

- How much of the lesson did students spend investigating, discussing, and practicing the mathematics?
- Did the discussion connect students' strategies to the mathematical relationship?
- Where did the lesson run short of time, and what did students miss as a result?
- How do teachers plan cumulative review so that ideas return across weeks?
- What does student work tell us about the mathematical relationships students understand, and what instruction should follow?

For School and District Leaders

Leaders set the conditions for instructional time through schedules, intervention plans, calendars, and decisions about extended breaks. Leaders can examine these decisions with evidence rather than assumptions.

Questions to consider:

- How many minutes of core mathematics does each grade receive, and how often is that time interrupted?
- Does intervention add to core mathematics, or does it replace part of it?
- If the calendar changes, as with a four-day week, how will we monitor instructional minutes, attendance, and student outcomes?
- How do we support students' opportunities to continue learning mathematics during summer and other extended breaks?
- What professional learning helps teachers use the available time well?

Continue With DMT Insight 40

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Read DMT Insight 40 for the research behind this Companion. Find it at mathsuccess.io/dmtinsights.