

STATION ROTATION: Grouping Students for Highly Individualized Learning

Promising Practices from Washington State

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STATION ROTATION: Grouping Students for Highly Differentiated Learning

Teachers have used station rotations with generations of students for small group instruction. This guide describes a way to leverage multiple classrooms with multiple teachers to group students for highly differentiated learning.



CASE STUDY SCHOOL

This guide describes a practice being implemented at Catalyst Public Schools (Catalyst). Catalyst is located in Bremerton, Washington and serves students in kindergarten to high school. The public charter school opened in September 2020. In 2023-24, Catalyst enrolled 485 students, 47% of whom were classified as low-income, and 16% of whom received special education services. For additional information, see [appendix A](#).

Practice Overview

What is this Practice?

In station rotation, multiple small groups of students move from one activity to another within a single class period, with a mix of independent and teacher-led work. Typically, teachers group students by the skills they still need to learn and focus instruction on those growth areas. The type of station rotation described in this guide combines students across multiple grade-level classrooms, each with two co-teachers. This way, teachers can effectively build student academic skills through highly individualized instruction.



DEFINING STATION ROTATION

While station rotation has been used for decades and across many countries as an instructional practice, technology has changed how stations can be used. One personalized learning study¹ defined station rotation as having the following attributes:

- The class must be split into groups.
- Students must rotate through two or more stations during a class period.
- Station rotation must be done at least twice a week.
- At least one station must incorporate the use of digital instruction.
- Each rotation must last at least 10 minutes.
- Stations and rotations must be within a single classroom under the same teacher.

Station rotation as described in this guide diverges somewhat from the description above because it combines students across multiple classrooms, each led by two teachers.

How is it Innovative?

Station rotation is not a new concept, especially in elementary schools. Catalyst has innovated on the practice of station rotation by using a co-teaching structure and combining multiple grade-level classrooms.

Schools without a co-teaching model can still use station rotations as described in this guide. For additional adult learning support, schools can use para-educators, special education teachers, or support staff during the times when students are in stations.

STATION ROTATIONS AT CATALYST

Catalyst's first graders, like all students at the school, take reading and math assessments before the school year begins. The first-grade team — composed of two classrooms, each with one lead teacher and one apprentice teacher — analyzes all first graders' data and then groups students based on existing skills. When school starts, students learn which group they will start in and which teacher will lead their group. For a block of time each day, students stay in their regular classroom or move to the other first-grade classroom, where they work with either the classroom's lead teacher or the apprentice teacher. Where and from whom students learn during these station rotation blocks changes a few times each semester, so teachers in both classrooms hold and reinforce consistent expectations during the learning blocks.

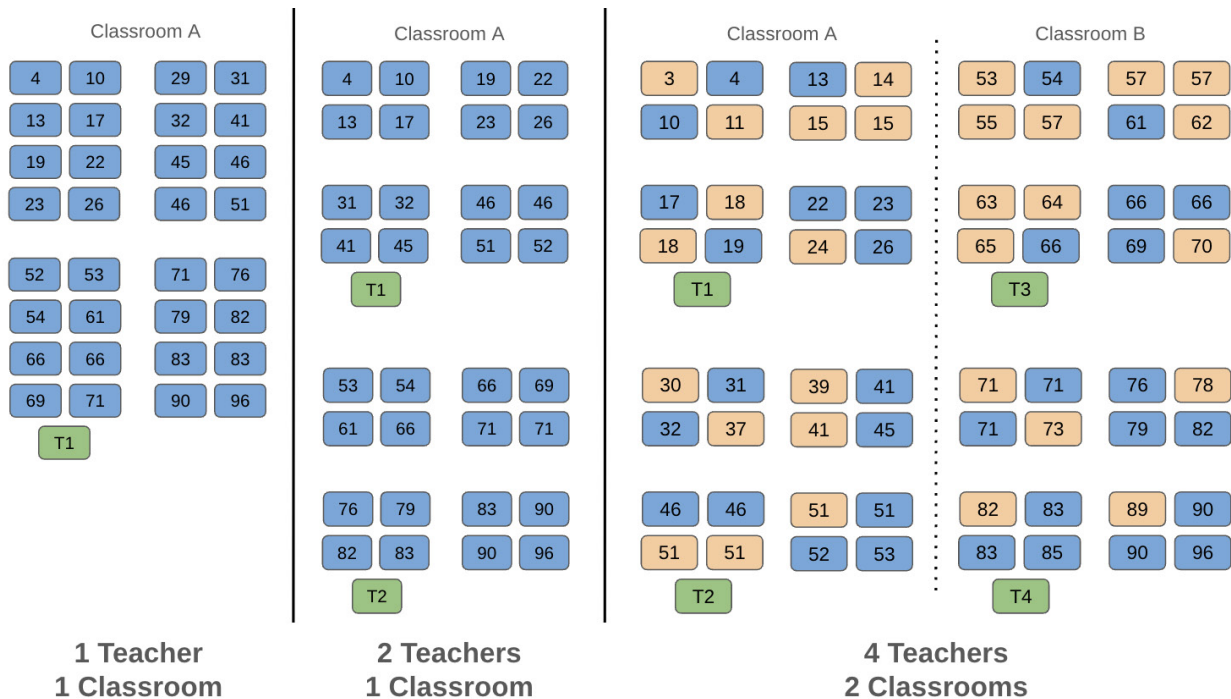
An essential component of station rotation is continuous data collection, which helps teachers regroup students when necessary and determine the specific skills to target with each group. Data-driven, individualized instruction is beneficial for the development of skills in subjects as diverse as math, reading, and social-emotional learning.

Implementing station rotation with a co-teaching model and multiple grade-level classrooms allows teachers to create homogenous, small groups of students, as figure 1 illustrates. The more similar the groups are, the more teachers can target specific skills that apply to just those students. This type of grouping strategy can help students make faster progress in their literacy and math skills.

WHY MORE STUDENTS MEANS BETTER GROUPINGS

Figure 1 gives three examples of different classroom compositions for station rotations and student groupings. To illustrate the possible distribution of student skill levels in a given classroom, rectangular icons are each labeled randomly with a number representing a current student skill level, at a range between 1 and 100. In a typical classroom, breaking students into small groups of eight lets teachers work with far fewer students at one time. But even in this situation, the range in student skill level can vary significantly. As shown in the first example, with one teacher in one classroom, the range of student skill level in a group is 22. When classroom co-teachers implement two sets of stations with four students each, as in the second example, the skill level range reduces to less than 10. In the third example, this range further reduces to an average of less than four.

FIGURE 1. How implementing station rotation with co-teachers and two classrooms can result in more individualization

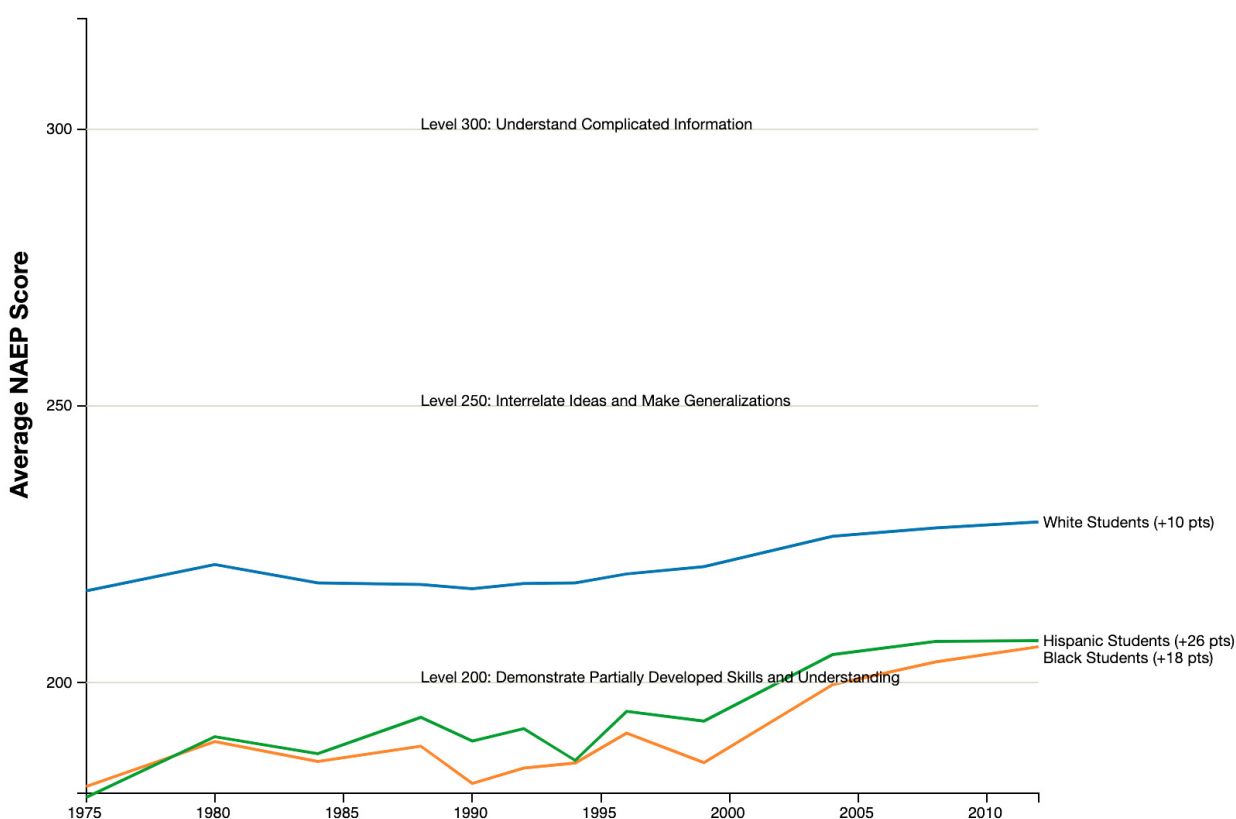


What is the evidence for station rotation?

What is the benefit of individualized instruction?

Over the last fifty years, the racial achievement gap has declined, primarily as a result of achievement growth for Black and Hispanic students, while white achievement has remained stagnant² (see figure 2 below). In order to further reduce the achievement gap for Black and Hispanic students, schools and teachers must implement highly effective teaching strategies, particularly those that target students' individual needs.

FIGURE 2. Student reading achievement at age 9 on the 2022 NAEP



One strategy to address historical achievement gaps is to differentiate and individualize instruction for all students. Effective individualized instruction, as possible with station rotations, requires teachers to see where students are in their educational journey, regardless of their background (e.g., socio-economic status, prior schooling, trauma).³ Learning can then be designed with students' dynamic realities in mind. Individualized instructional practices can have positive effects on student reading achievement⁴ and provide students with equal opportunity to improve regardless of demographics.⁵ Small group instruction significantly impacts students academically⁶ while also being more scalable than individual tutoring.⁷ Using data to inform individualized instruction makes it possible for students who have historically been poorly served by schools to receive an education that — over time — can reduce the achievement gap.

What isn't working about current approaches to station rotation?

Missed Opportunities

Station rotation is currently most often used in elementary grades. Teachers in higher grades are less likely to implement this type of practice,⁸ even though secondary students can work independently more effectively than younger students. Foundational skills remain important in secondary school, and stations are a simple way for teachers to devote time to targeted instruction while also teaching content.

Usage also varies by subject area. Though stations are often used in math classes to teach students specific skills, students can benefit tremendously from individualized instruction in English language arts. In practice, station rotation can help teachers individualize in any content area.

Behavior Management

Behavior management plays an important role in the successful implementation of station rotations because students need to work independently while the teacher works directly with one small group. Many teachers do not put in the time necessary to adequately set, teach, and review expectations for procedures and behavior during station rotations. As a result, these teachers are likely to experience frustration and lose instructional time to behavioral issues.

Stagnant Groupings

Many teachers create groupings for station rotations based on initial assessments and do not collect or use subsequent data to make instructional decisions. They keep groupings stagnant despite differing rates of progress and changing needs. Instead, teachers need to review student data regularly so they can adjust their instructional approaches, content, and groupings in order to maximize student learning.⁹

Lack of Coaching and Support for Teachers

Teachers need additional support to implement station rotation effectively. Not enough schools invest sufficient resources to ensure that teachers receive instructional coaching on a regular basis. Instructional coaches and professional development can help teachers understand how to best structure their classrooms for station rotation, use data to create groups, and determine the skills that students in each group need to focus on.





CASE STUDY

Highly Individualized Literacy Instruction with Station Rotation

At Catalyst Public Schools, station rotations (pods) are modeled from traditional practices that periodically separate classes into smaller groupings to personalize learning. With its co-teaching model, Catalyst has been able to adapt this practice. Having two teachers in each class and two classrooms for each grade level allows teachers to form small pods across classrooms, thus further individualizing instruction.

An example of pods can be seen in Ms. Eely's second-grade class, where she separates the class into groups of three to five students to work on reading skills. At one table, Ms. Eely works with one group of students reading a story, sounding out words and discussing the plot as they go. On the other side of the room, Ms. Hanson, the classroom's small group instructor, carries out a similar activity with another group. Some students read independently from books of their choosing, while another two groups are stationed on computers with headphones to focus on literacy skills at their reading levels. At the same time, two more groups sit at their desks, completing worksheets to target the skills that they need.

A timer sounds. Students put away their books, collect their materials, and line up in their groups before Ms. Eely instructs them to rotate stations. During the class period, each group will rotate through every station. The learning block ends with half of the students returning to their classroom.

The scenario described above is possible because two lead teachers combined their students for reading instruction. At the start of the 2023-24 school year, Ms. Eely and Ms. Hanson blended station rotations with their colleagues' second grade class across the hall. They had previously implemented the practice successfully in their own classrooms for math and literacy curricula. They found that collaborating with another class improved the process without drastically changing the look of station rotation. The larger number of students allowed for better, more homogenous groupings that had students more closely matched by instructional needs.



Catalyst introduced this alternative practice of station rotations at the first-grade level during the 2022-23 school year, combining classes only for literacy instruction. The teachers involved found the method to be highly effective, and the school decided to expand the use of this individualized teaching practice to the rest of the elementary school.

Catalyst uses data to help teachers determine students' various learning levels, allowing them to optimize grouping. As the lead teacher, Ms. Eely has been able to improve their practice of station rotations through data meetings with the school leader, who coaches Ms. Eely and other lead teachers in optimizing pod learning.

"We take their problem sets with us to a combined data meeting with myself and [the other lead second grade teacher] and [our coach]. We all sit and look at our most recent problem sets, and then we make goals. We decide what we can work on with the kids, how we can restructure groups, and then we take another problem set with us and look at that," said Ms. Eely.

At lower grade levels, some teachers were hesitant about implementing pods in their classrooms. Station rotations require two or more student groups to learn independently while teachers instruct the other groups. Teachers had concerns about student behavior. As one teacher explained, "This year particularly, there's a lot of behaviors more specifically in the classroom that I think made [us] a little nervous to try to do the movement of rotations."

In kindergarten classrooms — where students need extra support with directions and some independent work — teachers realized that they could adapt their rotations to address these concerns. One teacher described their solution: "I rotate with my three groups, and she rotates with her three groups, and just the teacher rotates [within their three groups.] We have them do the same set of work with us. And then we move from the activity to the next group. For the most part, I have one group doing Lexia on iPads. They're doing some type of technology. We're introducing more reading to them because we're trying to encourage more independent reading and reading for pleasure."

Teachers have been able to gradually add more independence into students' rotations to strengthen pods in the elementary school.

"I've been slowly trying to trickle in a little bit of independence and stuff like: 'Okay, now you guys are done with your iPads, just go hand it to someone at the other table and then come back,'" explained one kindergarten teacher.

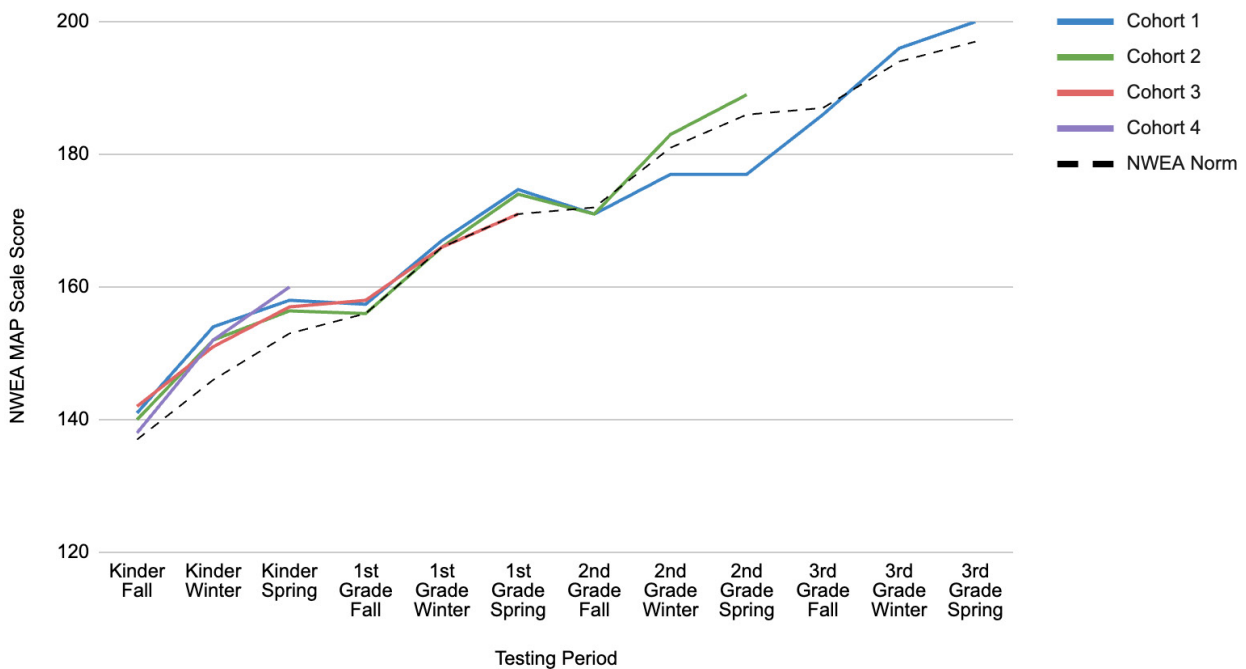


Teachers have noted a need for more independent work to be included in the curricula for Catalyst’s youngest students, as this would allow the teachers to create more groups during station rotations. While technology-based programs with audio directions help to maintain stations of independent learning, teachers do not necessarily want students to have excessive screen time.

Catalyst’s improved strategy for station rotation appears successful. While these gains cannot be attributed solely to station rotation, students have made consistent progress above their grade level norms. Catalyst’s 2023-24 kindergarteners (Cohort 4) began the year close to the NWEA MAP’s grade-level norm but finished with the highest average scale score. Catalyst’s first graders in 2023-24 were the only cohort that did not surpass the prior cohorts’ first-grade scores. Nevertheless, all cohorts have met or exceeded NWEA MAP’s grade-level norms for reading (see figure 3).

Looking forward, Catalyst aims to build on their success and continue strengthening their approach to station rotation.

FIGURE 3. NWEA MAP Reading scale scores for each of Catalysts Kindergarten cohorts



How to Implement This Practice



WHAT YOU NEED

SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

- Each teacher has an instructional coach.
- Classrooms have sufficient space for desks and students to be arranged in multiple and various groupings.
- Data systems (e.g., student information system, reporting system) support teachers to make instructional decisions.
- Teachers have sufficient preparation time before, during, and after school (in total, at least two hours per day).

LEADERSHIP MOVES

- Create coaching structures that support instructional improvement.
- Develop and support a spirit of innovation and risk-taking among teachers.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

- Teachers know what instructional practices are highly effective.
- Teachers know how to differentiate instruction.

MINDSETS

- Teaching staff understand that students come to school with different lived experiences and skills.
- Some students need alternative instructional approaches to learn the same content as their peers.
- Teachers do not have to be directly in front of students at all times for them to learn.





WHAT YOU NEED

RESOURCES

Staffing

- Instructional coaches for each teacher
- Multiple teachers in a classroom
- Special education teacher

Materials

- High-quality curricular materials
- Progress monitoring and interim assessments

Budget

- \$523 per pupil. Costs like staffing recur annually while others, like computers and some materials, are one-time costs. This cost is based on the amount of time required of a full-time equivalent teacher:
 - Special education teacher salary and benefits: \$141
 - Teaching assistant salary and benefits: \$100
 - Staff stipend for developing materials: \$77
 - Staff stipends for helping students outside of class/tutoring: \$54
 - Lesson planning: \$46
 - Teacher collaboration: \$31
 - Computers: \$30
 - Grading: \$28
 - Other materials: \$16

Steps to Implement

Catalyst Public Schools innovates upon the traditional station model by combining students across multiple classrooms and taking advantage of their [co-teaching model](#). The following steps are based loosely on this innovative method of implementing station rotations.

Preparing for Station Rotation

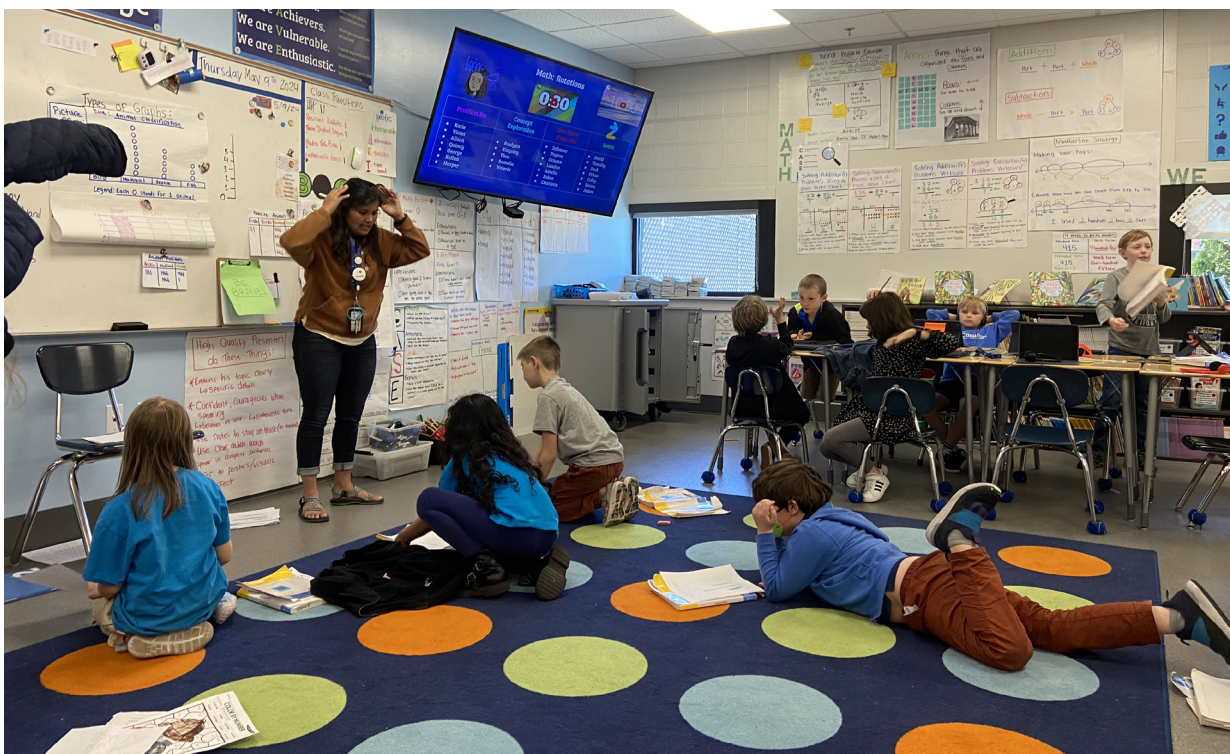
STEP 1: Prepare Teachers

Before introducing station rotation school-wide, determine whether any teachers are already implementing a version of it in their classrooms. Leaders can consider involving these teachers in the development of a whole-school strategy. Bringing them into the development process can boost buy-in across the school, encouraging teachers new to the process.

Training on station rotations should address how to do the following:

- Determine when to use station rotation
- Set up stations in the classroom
- Develop and teach students procedures
- Assess and reassess students at different intervals
- Use assessment data to make grouping and instructional decisions
- Differentiate instruction for each group and for students within groups
- Make changes when students are not making progress

It may be difficult to cover all of these topics in one professional development session or even before school starts in the fall. Consider which of the skills teachers need to have before school begins and which can be taught and reinforced later in the school year.



Since they will share students across classrooms, teachers should be given time to work with their grade-level teams to plan together for their stations. Students may change teachers as groupings shift throughout the year, so all grade-level teachers should share station rotation procedures.

It is helpful for teachers to practice their procedures for managing stations in the classroom before implementing them with students. Teachers should practice what they will say and do to signal group station changes, how they will direct students to move around the classroom, and how they will respond to disruptions.

STEP 2: Determine the Logistics for Stations

To determine how station rotations can be implemented in a classroom, teachers — with the help of instructional coaches and/or school leaders — need to assess a few factors:

- **Teacher capacity:** How confident are teachers in managing stations? How much variation in student ability can teachers effectively differentiate for?
- **Classroom space:** How many distinct spaces can be created in the classroom? Do all stations need distinct spaces?
- **Curricular materials:** What resources or materials are available for students to engage in meaningful independent work (i.e., students skill practice without teacher support)? Are there sufficient technology resources (e.g., tablets, chromebooks, laptops)?

Assessing the factors above helps a team identify how many stations are feasible; typically there will be between two to four stations per teacher.

STEP 3: Assess Students

Assess student skills at the beginning of the year using screeners to create initial groups. Once students are in these groupings, specific diagnostics can measure progress and identify areas for skill development.

Teachers should use this initial assessment data to set goals for student progress in the first quarter or semester of the school year. Many computer-based assessments now provide projected progress for each student. Teachers can use student baseline and progress data to monitor the needs of students who may require additional interventions. This data can also be shared with families to keep them informed of progress.

STEP 4: Develop Initial Groups

Targeted groups help teachers address specific student skills. For example, after assessing students' literacy skills, a teacher might determine that some students have similar needs in language comprehension and word recognition. The teacher might build two groups of students with similar needs, one to practice decoding and another to build vocabulary. For supportive, harmonious groups, also consider how students complement one another in personality and temperament.

Groups do not have to be perfect. They can and should change over time as teachers learn more about students' skills. Teachers can also consider changing groupings when they complete a content unit and turn their focus to a new set of skills. At Catalyst, teachers collect and analyze student data from stations every two weeks. Though they may not always change groupings based on this analysis, teachers use the data to help determine which skills need additional attention.

STEP 5: Design Stations

It is important for teachers to identify what they intend students to achieve at each station. Stations can each have a different purpose, and each station's learning or instructional strategy should align with its purpose. The following table gives examples of purposes for a station and how that station might be designed to accomplish that purpose.

PURPOSE	INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY
Learn new skills	Direct instruction from a teacher is the best way for students to learn a skill for the first time, as teachers explicitly teach necessary steps and identify misconceptions.
Practice recently learned skills Review older skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent practice on paper gives students a chance to cement learning. • Computer-based practice can be used similarly to a paper worksheet, but it changes the mode so that students feel like they are doing a different type of task. Many students enjoy having the sounds and animation of computer-based work, which also helps some students stay engaged. • Play and educational games can give students the chance to practice skills, individually or with peers, without it feeling like typical classwork. When students work collaboratively on these games, they also learn from discussion with their peers. • Pair or group discussion helps students learn from the thinking of their peers. Learning different metacognitive strategies from others may help some students find multiple ways of applying the same skill.
Explore areas of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a variety of reading texts available to students allows them to explore different topics of interest, providing opportunities for student agency in their learning. • Educational games allow students to engage with learning in a fun way. They also provide an opportunity for students to interact with one another. • Pair or group discussions allow students to learn together. Teachers can give students discussion prompts on a variety of topics to help students engage with and learn from one another. • Speech-to-text and text-to-speech make it possible for students of any age to use computers. Teachers can prepare links to easy-to-use websites and prompt students to explore online content on a topic of their choosing.

PURPOSE	INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY
Prime or pre-learn for new skill acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading texts helps students gain prior context about a topic before it is covered in class. Students can practice reading skills while learning about upcoming science or history content. Teachers can consider using ChatGBT to help them create short, grade-level texts. • Students can play games to give them early exposure to skills that will be taught. Games can include previews of vocabulary or prerequisite skills. • Pair or group discussions allow students to share prior knowledge with one another. Teachers should give students simple and clear prompts and also pre-teach skills for these types of independent discussions. • Computer-based activities can help students explore prior knowledge and skills independently. Adaptive software is particularly useful to ensure that students are accessing content that is level appropriate.

STEP 6: Lesson Plan for Each Group

[High-quality curricular materials](#) should include resources for both direct instruction and independent practice. Computer-based programs can be leveraged for at least one station to ensure that students can do meaningful independent work without additional teacher planning time.

At Catalyst, some stations provide students with assignments that are individually differentiated for their skill levels. That way, students can be grouped using one skill area — such as phonemic awareness — but still receive individualized practice in another skill area — like sentence structure — in the same group.

Catalyst teachers also have a station where students are able to use manipulatives or other hands-on instructional materials to think about math or English language arts in an alternative way. For example, students may be provided colored connecting blocks that they can use to depict place value creatively.

STEP 7: Create Procedures for Station Rotations

Students need clear and explicit instruction on teacher expectations when doing station rotation. Consider what classroom expectations should be for each of the following:

- Student-to-student communication at each station (e.g., no talking necessary at computer station, whispering only while working with the teacher)
- How students get help during stations
- What materials students need at each station
- How students prepare to leave a station
- How students move between stations
- Student roles in their group

Teachers should make sure students understand and have the chance to practice correct voice levels for each station. Many schools now use a voice level system (see image on the right) that helps students know what is expected of them during different types of instruction.

Catalyst students know where to line up at each station and what materials to have ready before moving to the next station. Teachers use various timers and bells to non-verbally indicate to students when stations will rotate. Posters on the walls, tape on the floor or carpets, and notes taped to desks can help reinforce many of these expectations for students.

4	Shouting
3	Loud Voice
2	Speaking
1	Whisper
0	Silent

Implement Station Rotations

STEP 1: Teach and Practice Station Procedures

As mentioned, practice of station rotations is essential for long-term success. Classroom management issues often interfere with teachers' efforts to implement station rotation, but this can be largely avoided by spending the first weeks of school teaching and reinforcing procedures with students. Start with student groups rehearsing their station rotations without academic work. This gives students time to learn expectations without academic pressure. Stations can have fun activities, such as learning about other students in the class, school trivia, or how to navigate websites they will use during the school year.

Teachers should be prepared to return to this type of procedural practice if a substantial number of students struggle to meet behavioral expectations. Teachers at Catalyst plan station rotation procedure practice after long weekends and school holidays to help students remember expectations.

STEP 2: Start Teaching Stations

Accessible content and clear expectations for students are key to successful station rotations — especially for independent stations. Teachers should celebrate success in a variety of ways. Fun displays of student progress, for example, can motivate students to work hard to reach goals. Catalyst teachers create paper rainbows to show the math skill levels that students have mastered — students add a colored ring to their rainbow every time they master a level. These levels correspond with the colored folders used at independent stations, and these rainbows help students stay motivated to work toward mastering skills while also creating transparency about student progress.

As students make progress toward mastery of skills, consider how students may need different types of support — such as increased repetition, additional real world examples, or direct practice with peers. In addition to tracking student progress, teachers should also note what kinds of instructional strategies they used.



STEP 3: Review Data and Make Adjustments to Groups and Lesson Plans

Collect formative data regularly to determine whether students are mastering skills and making progress. Different types of data can be useful throughout the school year.

- Daily formative assessments: Exit tickets or student independent work can help teachers determine what instructional needs students have for the next lesson. This data can be collected and reviewed daily or weekly.
- Progress monitoring: More comprehensive assessments are needed to determine how students are progressing on skills over time. Bi-weekly or monthly assessments help teachers determine what skills students have mastered and need to work on next.
- Interim assessments: These quarterly assessments help teachers determine where students are as they work toward mastery of grade-level standards across the school year.

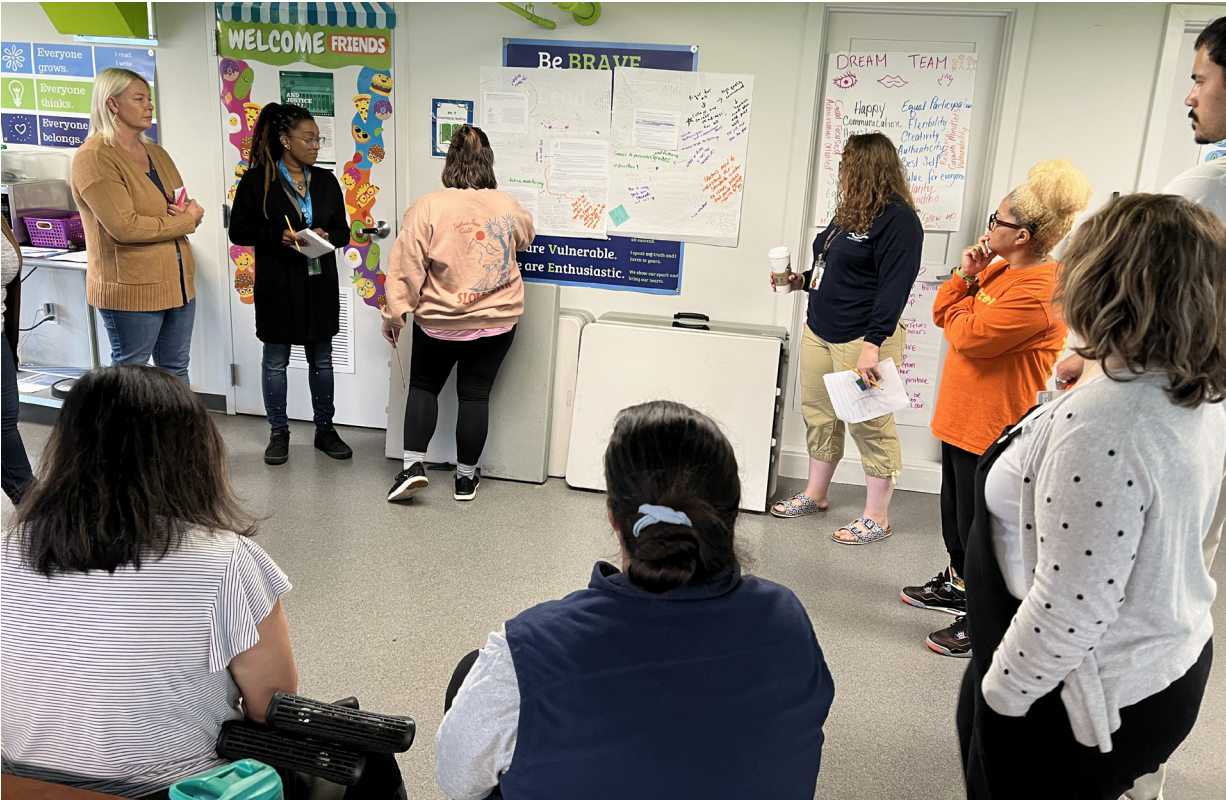
Each type of data should be reviewed regularly by teachers and grade-level teams to identify trends, student needs, and next steps for continued student progress.

Instructional coaches can play an important role in helping teachers reflect on data and plan instruction accordingly. Coaches can also support teachers by regularly observing station rotations. Coaches can also assist when teachers need to create groups or restructure groups based on assessment data. This type of coaching reinforces professional development.



Key Roles and Responsibilities

STAKEHOLDER	ACTIVITIES	TIME REQUIRED
Classroom teachers	Lesson planning	2–3 hours a week
	Data analysis	1–2 hours a week
	Material creation	2–3 hours a week
Instructional coach	Teacher observations	30–60 minutes a week
	Teacher 1:1 coaching meetings	1 hour a week
Special education teacher/ support staff	Co-planning	1–2 hours a week
	Adapting materials	2–3 hours a week



Potential Barriers

BARRIER	SOLUTION
Teachers do not trust students to work independently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers may benefit from observing classrooms, visiting nearby schools, or watching videos with successful station rotation in place. Coaching should focus on supporting teachers to create clear procedures for student independent groups. Teachers will need to give students ample time and repeated opportunities to practice procedures.
Student behavior at stations prevents students from learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching should focus on supporting teachers to create clear station procedures. Teachers will also need guided support to plan. Coaches should also help teachers create methods for providing positive behavior reinforcement, positive reinforcement for student behavior during stations.
Teachers do not have enough time to plan individualized stations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using rubrics for identifying high quality instructional materials, select curricula that will help teachers target grade-level skills. Encourage teachers to create material repositories. Individualizing instruction becomes easier over time if teachers have access to high quality materials. School leaders can give teachers additional preparation periods or devote professional development time to lesson planning.
Some students in a group are not making progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze recent student work or use an assessment tool to identify specific skills students are still struggling to master. Determine if the students who are struggling would be better served in a different group of students. When regrouping is not an option, find opportunities to differentiate instruction within the existing group. Use adaptive software at an independent station to allow students to work on skills that are specific to their needs. Find non-computer-based materials that can be differentiated for an independent station (see Step 6). Differentiate direct instruction in teacher-led stations.

Sustainability

It is essential to create practices for station rotations that can be implemented consistently over time. Consider the local context and plan for potential barriers to ensure sustainability of station rotations.

Coaching and Professional Development

Teachers benefit from instructional coaches' feedback and guidance in using student data to plan lessons, group and regroup students, and differentiate materials. This coaching is with both individual teachers and co-teaching pairs. Grade-level team meetings can also be used to support team alignment in their use of station rotations.

Sufficient Preparation Time

Teachers need time for student data analysis, lesson planning, and collaborating with peers to align on instruction and procedures. This can happen during common planning times or during professional development.

Reinforcement of Procedures

Station rotations run smoothly day-to-day when teachers consistently reinforce procedures. Five to ten minutes of procedural practice once a month, along with continuous daily monitoring and gentle reminders in the moment, preserve valuable instructional time by maintaining student focus and minimizing distractions. Teachers can plan these practice times to occur after long weekends or vacations from school. They can also happen when groups are changing for some students, for example after a round of progress monitoring assessments.

Funding

As with most new initiatives, schools need to think about the long-term financial investment necessary to sustain a practice like station rotations. An implementation like Catalyst's requires considerable time and money for two educators in a classroom, initial and ongoing professional development, high quality instructional materials, and the development of new/ adapted materials. School leaders should plan for higher costs in the first one to three years of implementing station rotations.

Local Adaptations

Different schooling contexts may require adaptations to successfully implement the practice. Consider carefully how the practice fits within the existing school structure and how far the system can be pushed in order to implement this practice with fidelity.

One Teacher Per Classroom

Station rotations are typically implemented with just one teacher in the classroom. However, that limits the practice's capacity for deeply individualized instruction. A school with solo-taught classrooms can consider combining multiple classrooms to expand the pool of participating students and thereby minimize student skill variation within groups. Solo teachers can also divide their own class into more groups, with fewer students in each, though doing so reduces the time the teacher can spend on direct instruction with each group.

Fewer Stations

If needed, teachers can consider cutting back station rotation preparation time by having fewer stations. For example, one independent work station can host a large group of students completing computer- or paper-based individualized assignments while a teacher engages one small group at a time in direct instruction of targeted skills.

No Instructional Coaching

In the absence of instructional coaching, teachers need consistent school-based professional development on topics like analyzing data to inform differentiated instruction. Teachers will also need time to collaborate so they can learn from one another and share resources.

How to Monitor Success

It is useful to create a theory of change to identify the outcomes you want to measure. (See [appendix B](#) for a sample theory of change that can be adjusted based on your school's goals.) It is important to look at short- and long-term outcomes, as well as implementation effectiveness.

Outcomes

POTENTIAL OUTCOME	MEASUREMENT TOOL
Improved student reading and/or math achievement	NWEA Map (reading and math), iReady, Lexia, DIBELS, or any other assessment given at least 3x annually
Reduction in the achievement gap between white students and students of color	Subgroup difference on NWEA Map (reading and math), iReady, Lexia, DIBELS, or any other assessment given at least 3x annually

Implementation Indicators

POTENTIAL INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT TOOL
Individualized lesson plans for groups	Lesson plan rubric
Increased student engagement	Teacher observation tool

Resources

Materials

- [Lesson Plan Template for Station Rotations by Better Lesson](#)

Measurement Tools

- [Student Engagement Observation Tool](#)
- [Rubrics to Assess High Quality Instructional Materials](#)

Additional Information

- [Station Rotation Research Brief](#)
- [Station Rotation by Better Lesson](#)
- [Examples of Adaptations to Station Rotations](#)
- [Optimize Station Rotation in Blended Learning](#)

Endnotes

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APPENDIX A:

Profile of Catalyst Public School

Location: Bremerton, Washington

Founded: 2020

Level: K-8 (will include high school as of fall 2024)

Teachers: 29

ENROLLMENT	2022-23 SY	2023-24 SY
Number enrolled	439	485
Students with disabilities	15.7%	15.5%
Multilingual learners	0%	0%
Foster youth	0%	0%
Low-income students	49.2%	47.0%
Homeless students	0%	0%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [school report card](#)

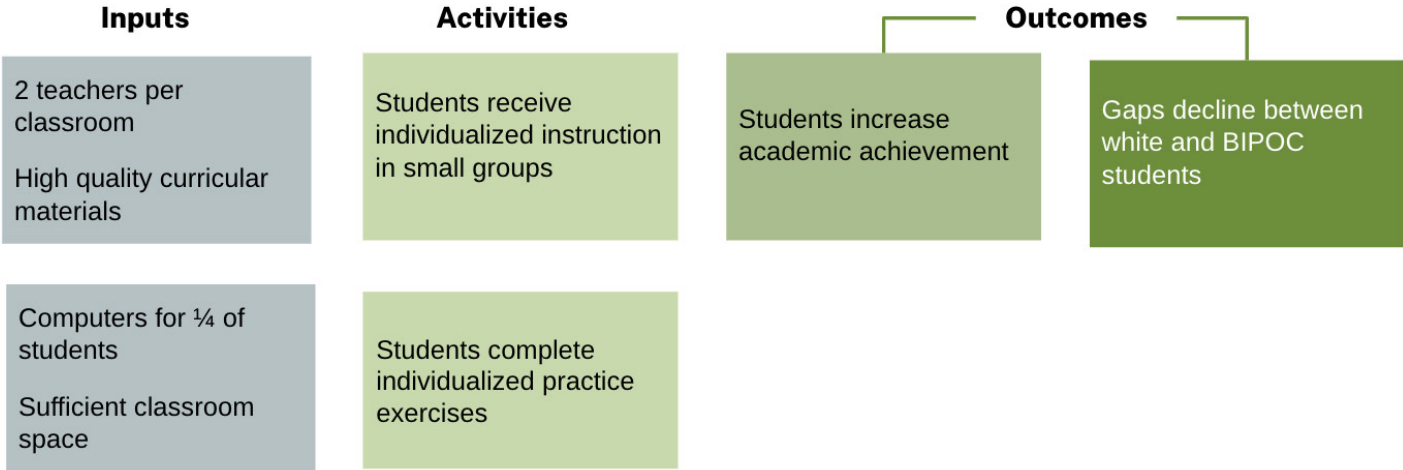
RACE/ ETHNICITY	2022-23 SY	2023-24 SY
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.9%	0.2%
Asian	3.6%	3.9%
Black or African American	8.7%	8%
Hispanic or Latino	15.0%	16.5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.2%
Two or more races	12.1%	11.3%
White	59.2%	59.8%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [school report card](#)

ACADEMIC PROFILE	2021-22 SY	2022-23 SY
Attendance	71.1%	73.0%
Percent meeting ELA standards	57.7%	48.8%
Percent meeting math standards	49.2%	45.1%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [school report card](#)

APPENDIX B: Logic Model for Catalyst's Station Rotations



About the Project

Project Description

This guide is part of a two-year participatory evaluation that concluded in May, 2024. We worked with Washington State public charter schools Lumen High School and Catalyst Public School. The evaluation started with a single question: “What is working in your school?” Researchers Georgia Heyward and Sivan Tuchman worked closely with school leaders to identify promising practices and create research plans to study implementation and outcomes. The result is [six guides](#) for each of the practices identified:

- Collaborative Conversations: A Skill-Building Restorative Practice
- Co-Teaching for All: Using Two Educators in a Classroom
- Cultivating Connection: How to Design and Implement School-Based Mentoring
- Social Health: A New Model for Wrap-Around School Services
- Station Rotation: Grouping Students for Individualized Learning
- Summer Professional Development: Creating a Foundation of Teacher Relationships

We also produced a [summary report](#) identifying how schools and systems can create learning environments that promote whole-school wellbeing. See that report for a full description of the research methodology.

Author

Sivan Tuchman, PhD is the founder of Datability Education Consulting. Dr. Tuchman is committed to helping her clients use data and evaluation to improve outcomes for all learners. Sivan spent 8 years as a special education teacher before earning her doctorate in education policy at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Prior to founding Datability, she was a researcher at the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

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