



River Forest  
Public Schools

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To: Dr. Edward Condon  
From: Larry Garstki  
Re: Block Schedule Recommendation  
Date: April 12, 2021

The main goal of any school is to continually improve teaching and learning. Hiring and developing quality teachers might be the most significant factor that contributes to school improvement. Other factors that assist in sustaining and retaining quality teachers is providing resources and creating conditions that make teaching and student learning more efficient and effective. One of those conditions is how the instructional day is set up for teachers. For many years, Roosevelt has used a very traditional eight periods (40 minutes) per day schedule to organize instruction. However, recent circumstances have forced Roosevelt to utilize a block schedule. This change has led to positive results and favorable attitudes for teachers and students and is the motivation for this memo that serves to recommend and justify the consideration of continuing with a block schedule next year.

In addition, there is a tremendous amount of research done on block schedules that highlight opportunities for teachers and students to benefit from a longer, sustained instructional period. Longer class periods give teachers more time to deliver planned instruction, develop key concepts, increase the creativity of lessons and try activities that accommodate different learning styles. Individual student projects, peer collaboration, and additional time for one-to-one individualization for both support and enrichment are possible. Because teachers see students on an every-other-day basis, it doubles the amount of time for relationship building during each class session and personal connections between the teacher and students.

These important factors and others had been presented to the community almost 2 years ago when the block schedule was first introduced as a way to increase the amount of math instruction per week. Unfortunately, at the time, the block schedule as presented would have required a reduction in English-Language Arts in 5th and 6th grade and World Languages in all grades. Moving to a block schedule was also met with apprehension on the part of many teachers that had never taught in a block schedule before. Making such a substantive change without certainty of success seemed like a risk not worth taking. This, combined with the decrease in ELA and World Language instructional time, led to the final approval of an alternate schedule option that included additional math instruction but did not effectuate the transition to a block schedule.

Since then, as a means of reducing the amount of student mobility within the school due to the Covid-19 pandemic response, Roosevelt has had to utilize a block schedule this school year. Like many things that teachers needed to learn out of necessity during the pandemic, teachers adapted to - and learned to teach very successfully - "in the block."

Early this year the feedback from teachers was surprisingly positive. Teachers were noticing not only a more relaxed pace to the school day as a whole, but also one that was equally as productive (or even

more so). The blocked schedule approach was providing opportunities to introduce a concept, provide quality guided practice, reflection and monitor independent practice, all in one class period. Teachers were saying that bringing a concept full circle in one class has been something they've never been able to do before consistently and were also seeing student participation and engagement increase as a result.

The positive feedback continued throughout the year. Teachers started asking if we could continue with a block schedule even after the pandemic restrictions were lifted. To get a more accurate perspective about how many teachers supported this proposition we conducted an anonymous survey. Seventy one percent of the teachers preferred the block schedule to the traditional 8-period day. These results were particularly powerful because teachers have actually been teaching in the block and were expressing their preferences based upon experience. At the same time, we surveyed the students' opinions and 60% of the students preferred the blocked schedule over the 8-period day. I believe this is a testament to the increased ability for positive relationships to be built and the increased interest and attention of students toward class that teachers had indicated.

It is important to stress that the proposed block schedule does not decrease instructional minutes in any subject area. This schedule has also been endorsed by all departments including special education and related services (social work, speech path, OT and PT). I strongly believe that this teacher endorsed decision, based on first hand experience, will result in many positive outcomes in both teaching and student learning. It is our strong recommendation that Roosevelt continue to offer instruction utilizing the block schedule in the 2021-22 school year. Separate from the fact that our operations will require ongoing use of this schedule this fall because of the pandemic, the blocked master schedule has proven itself superior through experiences in supporting the District's instructional, social-emotional, academic, and strategic goals for student success.