

## **Background of BHS Schedule**

Prior to the current block schedule at Buffalo High School (BHS), a traditional six period day was used. Courses were delivered in either a year-long format or a semester format. Teachers taught 5 out of the 6 periods of the day, with one prep period. While the new physical structure of the high school was being built, considerations were also being made about the daily structure that would be the best fit for BHS. At that time, a task force researched and reviewed high school schedule structures, focusing on how to allow students more choice, longer class periods to engage in content, and fewer classes to manage during the school day. The decision was made to implement the block schedule beginning in the 1996-1997 school year. The block has offered several benefits and has served many of the district's high school students well over the past 25 years. The myriad of course choices the high school has been able to add and the district able to support over the years has been beneficial to allow students to create a personalized pathway to their graduation. The block schedule also provided teachers a longer period of instructional time within a class period to go deeper into topics and hands-on learning experiences such as labs.

As challenges surfaced within the block schedule, the high school administration implemented a variety of programs and strategies in an attempt to better serve all students at BHS; in particular, students who need additional supports such as interventions and credit recovery. In the fall of 2019, an MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) schedule was implemented, replacing our Bison Time (intended for enrichment opportunities) and AAA (Arts, Academics, and Activities). It allotted time during our school day with BASE (Bison Academic Support and Enrichment) and Advisory (purposeful connections and Social-Emotional Learning with students and staff). This scheduling move was intended to be more purposeful and targeted with this time during the school day for intervention, meaningful connections between staff and students, as well as student to student connections.

In a further effort to allow for specific interventions for students, Math and Science split blocks were created. This allows for some students to work on these curricula over a longer period of time, taking both courses over a year's time, rather than the semester half year schedule. In 2020, a Senior Study option was opened for some students in their last year at BHS to allow for individualized flexibility to Senior Schedules, as well as relieve areas where class counts were extremely high. These adjustments to the current block schedule have shown positive results.

## **Evidence of Need for Change**

While several adjustments have been made to the block schedule, challenges still exist. One data point that indicates a need for change is the current failure rate in core classes. Analysis shows that our highest failure rates occur in our required Science and Math courses, and evidence shows that when these failures occur in the 9th grade year, students struggle to recover. Throughout the years, various attempts have been made to meet the needs of students who demonstrate a need for additional support. Some specific course adjustments have been implemented, such as: skills classes, a split block to share Intermediate Algebra and Science 9, a split block to share Chemistry with Algebra 2, co-taught classes with both subject-area teachers and special educators, as well as pull out skills courses. Although these adjustments have provided additional opportunities to support students, there continues to be a gap regarding access to the most appropriate courses and interventions available to all students. All students should have access to intervention without sacrificing all or most of their elective choices. Keeping more equitable access to these choices/courses should be a priority.

As the formula for staffing has shifted and tightened over the past two decades district wide, class size has continued to creep up to a point where several areas of the building simply have too many students needing more individualized and/or smaller group settings and experiences. Calculations with current student numbers, staffing, and four-block day show that the average class size is 30.17 students. However, analysis done by the [District Management Group](#) (DM Group) also shows great disparity within that average: English classes ranged from 18-40, Math from 11-36, Science from 12-35, and Social Studies from 23-34 students per class in the 2020-2021 school year. Due to the limited number of offerings of a course within a calendar year, the BHS Master Schedule can become “locked up,” forcing higher numbers to be placed into certain sections of a course. The DM Group discovered that in the core academic areas (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies) 23% of all courses have low enrollment or only one section offered per year. Within electives, 34% of courses are single-section or low-enrollment.

A block schedule provides, in general, 75% (three classes of direct instruction per day, and one prep period per teacher) of staff in front of students at any given time. Other schedules are more efficient and show a higher percentage of staff in front of students during the school day. For example, five periods per day instead of four, allows for direct instruction four out of five periods per day, and one prep period. This means teachers are working directly with students 80% of the school day. This can also add flexibility when it comes to creating a master schedule, eliminating single-section offerings and potentially balancing class sizes more equally for those courses.

## **Site Vision for BHS Schedule**

Buffalo High School needs a schedule that will not only be more efficient and sustainable over time, but also ensures that the shared priorities of students, teachers, families, and community are upheld. Through this process, Buffalo High School examined their current mission

statement, which states:

In partnership with our families and community, Buffalo High School prepares each student for a successful future. In an academically rigorous and supportive environment, we prioritize learning, equity, and meaningful relationships. Together, we value student agency, growth, and connections.

Using this as a guiding framework, a BHS Scheduling Task Force was created and began its work in February 2021. This committee of 18 staff represented the core and elective areas of the high school, along with administrators and the district's Director of Teaching & Learning. The Task Force met to discuss and determine the top three priorities of the building that would be best for students, teachers, family, and community. It was determined that the following priorities must be strongly considered: class size, intervention, and student choice.

### **Summary of Process for Review of Schedule Options**

The BHS Scheduling Task Force of 18 includes a smaller group of staff members that include the district's Director of Teaching & Learning, two administrators, one core teacher, one elective teacher, one counselor, and one special education teacher. Together, this group began extensive work with the [District Management Group](#) (DM Group) by participating in a virtual Scheduling Institute. One role of the DM group was to help collect data based on our current block schedule (class size, efficiency of scheduling, organization of class offerings, use of time within the school day, percentage of courses offered within core areas, etc.) in order to facilitate conversations regarding changes that might be considered when determining a schedule to better fit the three main priorities identified by the BHS Scheduling Task Force. This information was then shared with the larger Task Force group, and then with the entire staff through faculty meetings, listening posts, and surveys. DM Group facilitated discussions with different panels of staff, and students, in order to further focus the direction Buffalo High School may take to find a schedule that is more efficient, as well as a schedule that more closely aligns with our priorities.

The results of the DM Group analysis provided a [final report](#) of opportunities and recommendations. Several scheduling options aligned with these recommendations were shared. Task Force team members were able to ask questions and discuss the pros and cons of each schedule option. It is important to note that both the DM group, as well as the BHS Scheduling Task Force recognize that there is **not** a perfect schedule in existence, so focused instead on finding a schedule that more closely aligns with our main priorities within the parameters (start and stop times during the school day, budget constraints, current teaching contracts, etc.). The DM Group presented many schedules, and the Task Force was also encouraged to bring forth schedule options they had experienced or seen. The group explored schedules that ranged from a traditional six period day, to a modified cascading eight course schedule. All schedules were first vetted by the small group to find four schedule possibilities. The group was able to bring forward the following schedules: a traditional seven period day, a cascading seven period schedule, a modified block schedule with seven course offerings per

year, and a five period by three trimester schedule. (To view the schedules, please view [this link](#).) The four schedules brought forward were eventually narrowed down to the latter two choices.

Two different school districts that currently operate on these schedules were contacted. Representatives from Forest Lake High School were invited to discuss the modified block schedule, and staff from St. Michael/Albertville High School were also interviewed regarding the five period trimester schedule. Both schedules showed the most promise when it comes to the priorities of BHS, as well as current parameters previously identified. Members of the BHS Scheduling Task Force had the opportunity to ask teachers from each school questions, allowing for a more detailed look at each schedule. An [update](#) was brought forward to the BHM School Board in June of 2021.

In August of 2021, the Buffalo Scheduling Task Force (group of 18) met to discuss the importance of the timeline for the decision making process, as well as the importance for the necessary work required to properly implement a new schedule. Timelines were shifted, and the decision was made to bring forward a recommendation of a new schedule for BHS in November of 2021, with the intent for full implementation beginning Fall of 2023. The last week of August, these updates were presented to all staff, as well as opportunities for discussion at a department level. Staff were also asked to complete a survey regarding thoughts on each of the two final schedule options.

September of 2021 brought a district-wide discussion of possible implementation for each schedule, and what it could mean for other sites within the district. It was determined that both the modified block, which runs on a quarter schedule, as well as the five period trimester could work into the larger district calendar. In October of 2021, a listening post gave staff an opportunity to further discuss and question both scheduling options, and the BHS Scheduling Task Force met to guide a final decision. It was at the end of this meeting that a final decision was made as to which schedule would be brought to the BHM School Board for approval.

### **Recommendation**

The BHS Scheduling Task Force recommends that we proceed with a five-period trimester schedule for BHS to be implemented Fall of 2023. A sample schedule showing the 5 periods is available at this [link](#). It is important to note that within this draft, the exact timing of BASE, Advisory, and lunches has not yet been finalized.

Training sessions with DM Group [highlighted](#) specific areas of student need for future schedules, including effective intervention supports, incorporating Social-Emotional Learning / Advisory, and student-centered staffing. The task force utilized this research, in addition to the priorities set forth by discussions and focus group interviews, to weigh the advantages and challenges of the five-period trimester schedule. In [examining the numbers](#), a five-period trimester schedule offers the following possibilities:

1. *Reduced average class sizes.* With an increased teacher efficiency ratio, average class sizes are projected to decrease from a current 30.17 to 28.28 students per class.
2. *Student choice in electives.* On the block schedule, students take 32 semester courses over four years (8 per year). On a trimester schedule, students take 30 semester-equivalent courses over 4 years (7.5 per year). This results in 6.2% loss of course options over a student's high school career. The trimester schedule retains the most student choice of all schedules reviewed by the task force.
3. *Targeted interventions.* In light of post-pandemic learning loss and learning gaps, DM Group recommended that BHS offer multiple methods of delivering specific interventions by content-area teachers. Opportunities exist within a trimester schedule to offer courses "stretched" over 3 trimesters, allowing students the option to work at a more manageable pace. With five periods within the school day, a trimester schedule is also conducive to offering single-term interventions (such as a math remediation or refresher course), and skills courses (Special Education and English Language Development).
4. *Incorporates Advisory and Social-Emotional Learning.* As identified by research highlighted by DM Group, SEL (Social Emotional Learning) taught during a purposeful Advisory must be a priority in a successful school schedule. The trimester schedule drafted includes a 7.3 hour/year increase in Advisory/BASE time as compared to our current block schedule. These connections have been shown to have a direct impact on student well-being and overall academic success.

### **Program Implications**

The Task Force discussed many possible ripple effects of implementing the trimester schedule which would affect curriculum, systems, staff, and students at BHS. The Task Force identified a clear need to adjust current curriculum to align with a trimester schedule. This will involve modifications of individual courses to complete standards and objectives within a new time frame (63 minutes per period vs 78 minutes per block) and term length (113.1 hours per semester course vs. 121.8 hours per two-trimester course). In addition, decisions regarding course offerings will be needed to determine which courses will be offered for one or two trimesters. The BHS course catalog will need to be updated to reflect these changes.

Systems within BHS that would be affected include AVID, Special Education, and our graduation requirements. There will be a transition period as BHS converts the current block/quarter credits to trimester credits. Opportunities and challenges within AVID include the opportunity to offer the AVID elective course for two or three trimesters, and a possible need for additional AVID elective teachers. Within Special Education staff will need to review student Individualized Education Program (IEP) Plans to consider appropriate changes. Staff will need to be flexible with classroom spaces on a five-period day, and staff will most likely need to prep in an office area rather than their classroom. Staff who teach project-based courses will need to find storage space and materials to accommodate five sections of a course per day rather than four. The Task Force predicts that students will need additional time to work with their guidance counselors to adjust their 4-year plan, course requests, and registration for the first few years of

the transition.

### **Financial Implications**

Though the schedule change does not request funds for additional teaching staff, or added FTE's, the Task Force has identified areas that will require financial support from the School Board. The most significant need will be for paid curriculum writing time for staff. The trimester schedule is a calendar change for every course offered at BHS, and modifications will take focused effort in every department. Curriculum writing is planned for Summer of 2022, and may be estimated to include 10-20 hours per course. The Scheduling Task Force will continue to meet to work out details of the transition, which would be paid time after contract hours. In addition, there may be a need for additional classroom materials, such as textbooks, when offering 5 sections of a course simultaneously. Partnering with the DM Group to guide the transition to a new schedule may also be considered, and their fee would incur an additional cost.

### **District Implications**

Implementing a five-period trimester schedule at BHS affects other areas of our district. The most notable adjustment would be to our District Calendar, with BHS operating on a trimester while our Middle School and Elementary Schools would continue to operate on a quarter/semester system. An example calendar of [how a trimester calendar can overlap with the quarter calendar](#) to reduce the impact on students, families, and shared staff who will need to consider both has been developed for consideration. Further work will need to be done to determine the impact on staff who are shared between BHS and other sites operating on a new calendar and daily schedule.

### **Implementation Implications**

It is clear that the implementation of a new schedule affects others outside of the Buffalo High School building. Communication and consideration to the schedules of the educational institutions will be necessary. These include, but are not limited to: Wright Tech Center, PRIDE Transitions, and Southwest Metro. In addition, informational panels will need to be held to offer students and their families time to learn about and ask questions regarding the new schedule. Further discussion will also be required in order to create a final daily bell schedule. In the past several years, there have been some adjustments to where intervention and enrichment periods are placed during the school day. This will continue until a correct fit is reached that best serves the needs of students and staff well.

There will need to be time to create adjustments to the curriculum that is currently being taught. Some courses may be condensed, and some courses may also be combined with others to better accommodate the needs of students in a new schedule. Courses that will continue in their traditional sense will need to be modified due to the fact that class time will increase when

shifting from a semester to trimesters. It will also mean that curriculum will not only be paced differently, but it will also be introduced at different times during the calendar year. This will require time during the '21-'22, '22-'23 school years, as well as summer sessions to properly prepare courses for implementation. The current proposed timeline can be viewed [here](#).

### **Evaluation**

Data will be collected to determine if progress has been made regarding overall class size, failure rates, and access to interventions and appropriate courses to meet the needs of all students. The counseling department will also run reports to determine if overall scheduling is more effective and efficient on the newly implemented schedule. The proposed changes will allow for a rebalancing of time students are spending in core area curricula. Data will be compared to previous failure and success rates in core areas to determine if the increased percentage of time correlates to higher success rates in these areas. Staff, student, and stakeholder surveys will be analyzed to review perceived success and understanding of the new schedule.