

Proposal for Block Scheduling

Tupelo High School

Currently @THS

- Problems/Concerns
 - Classes are 48 minutes
 - About 43-45 minutes are instructional
 - Class changes occur 8 times daily
 - 129-135 hours of instructions lost (4 minutes per class change)
 - Up to 2 weeks of additional instructional time is lost due to exemption policy.

Block Scheduling

- Gordon Cawelti (1994) defines it as follows:
"At least part of the daily schedule is organized into larger blocks of time (more than sixty minutes) to allow flexibility for a diversity of instructional activities."

Block Scheduling

- Conversion to block scheduling became a widespread trend in American middle schools and high schools in the 1990s.
- Prior to that, many schools scheduled classes such that a student saw every one of their teachers each day.
- Classes were approximately 40–60 minutes long, but under block scheduling, they became approximately 90 minutes long.

Not the Magic Bullet

- It is not the magic bullet but it can improve some of the concerns that THS is currently facing with the quality of instruction.
- Components of the block schedule can assist with providing more time to improve the quality of instruction.

Not the Magic Bullet

- Despite the popularity of block scheduling, research findings are mixed and show no clear advantage of one schedule over the other.
- The inconsistency of these results leaves school administrators with no clear direction about whether they should stay with traditional schedules or risk changing to one of the block schedule variations.

Advantages of Block Schedule

- Part of the motivation for block scheduling is to prepare students for taking end-of-grade/end-of-course standardized tests used to measure student.
- Another is social—to foster cooperation among students.
 - This is done by having students work in groups (called "cooperative learning") to help them learn from each other, rather than have classes that focus on teacher-delivered content, as some experts believe that students learn better from peers than from professionals.

Advantages of Block Schedule

- Larger blocks of time allow for a more flexible and productive classroom environment
- More opportunities for using varied and interactive teaching methods.

Advantages

– Other benefits listed by Jeffrey Sturgis (1995) include:

- more effective use of school time,
- decreased class size, increased number of course offerings,
- reduced numbers of students with whom teachers have daily contact,
- and the ability of teachers to use more process-oriented strategies.

Disadvantages to be Addressed

- Block scheduling has been criticized as resulting in class periods that exceed the attention span of students, resulting in less retention and watering down of the material to maintain interest. It may result in gaps of weeks or months where students are receiving no instruction in a specific subject like math or history, and critics say this results in retention problems and the need for more remedial review.
- Students who miss a block-scheduled day will miss a considerable amount of material in a single subject, possibly making it more difficult to catch up. Mid-term transfers between schools with different schedules is problematic due to the need to repeat certain material while other material has been missed.¹
- Furthermore, many programs suffer from lack of daily exposure to subject matter on an A/B block schedule. Courses like mathematics, foreign languages, and music benefit from daily practice and suffer from a lack thereof.¹
- A University of Virginia study of 8,000 college students found that students who had block scheduling in high school performed worse in college science courses.

Next Steps for Exploratory Process

- Inform the Board
- Before instituting major schedule changes, it's desirable to have a common vision, a good plan, and strong support of all stakeholders.

Exploratory Process

1. A general presentation regarding the pros and cons of various models of block scheduling.
2. Visits by teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders to schools having block schedules
3. Faculty discussion meetings, leading to a vote or consensus
4. Parent and community meetings
5. Assemblies for students conducted by students from other schools or by their peers who have visited other schools
6. Distribution of relevant research data and implementation procedures.
7. School board presentations and approval
8. Staff development focused on the appropriate design of curriculum and use of extended blocks of time for instruction.

References

- Cawelti, Gordon. *High School Restructuring: A National Study*. Arlington, Virginia: Educational Research Service, 1994. 75 pages. ED366 070.
- Sturgis, Jeffrey D. "Flexibility Enhances Student Achievement." *NASSP AP Special: The Newsletter for Assistant Principals* 10, 4 (Summer 1995): 1-2.