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ABSTRACT

Block Scheduling has been considered a cure for a lengthy list of educational problems. This report reviews the literature on block schedules and describes some Oregon high schools that have integrated block scheduling. Major disadvantages included resistance to change and requirements that teachers change their teaching strategies. There is evidence, however, that block scheduling leads to a more relaxed school atmosphere, improved student attitudes, improved student-teacher relationships, decreased dropout rates, decreased absenteeism, a dramatic drop in disciplinary problems, and accelerated student progress. Recommendations for successful change include: (1) promote stakeholder ownership; (2) obtain support from the school district and school board; (3) provide adequate time for planning, staff-development opportunities, and collaborative problem solving; (4) brainstorm creative alternatives; and (5) conduct regular evaluation. Interviews were conducted with a total of 20 principals, assistant principals, administrators, and educators. (Contains 32 references.) (LMI)

BLOCK SCHEDULING IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Preface

If your high school or middle school isn't on some form of block scheduling already, the staff is probably at least talking about it. Or has. Or soon will be. There's no escape. Journals are full of block scheduling, and the practice is spreading like hundreds of wildfires throughout the country. When one school in a region tries it, the sparks quickly spread to others.

Block scheduling is touted as a cure for a depressing list of educational ills: discipline problems, high dropout rates, student apathy, budget cutbacks, and shallow learning. It is said to upgrade the quality of teaching, improve the instructional climate, and result in a more effective use of time, space, and resources, all at little or no added cost.

Sounds like Dr. Feelgood's Magic Schoolfix Elixer—too good to be true. Any practice that trendy, that much balyhooed, can't help but breed skepticism. Can block scheduling deliver on these extravagant claims or is it just the latest of many educational fads? Will your school have to try it, whether the staff thinks it's a good idea or not, just to keep from looking backward?

This Bulletin provides some clarification. It looks at the literature on block scheduling, then shifts the spotlight to some Oregon high schools that have integrated block scheduling into their educational environment. Since most of these experiments are fairly new, hard data on the scholastic impact are still scarce. Nonetheless, there's much to be learned from what other schools are doing and how they decided to make their changes.

The author, Karen Irmsher, has a master's degree in education and bachelor's degrees in both English and journalism. Among other things, she has taught in grades K-12 and worked as a reporter for the *Springfield News*. She is currently an instructor at Lane Community College, teaching reading and language arts to adults who read below fifth-grade level.

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Introduction

Six classes a day, five days a week, every day the same schedule.

Telephones and radios were still mere novelties when high schools nationwide petrified the school day into this rigid pattern. The paper clip had been invented, but not the refrigerator or television, much less the copy machine, computer, and VCR that now play such an integral role in our lives.

We live in a very different world today, and we know immeasurably more about how students learn. Yet most contemporary secondary school students are still locked into the same archaic schedule that their great-grandparents experienced when they were teenagers.

The Carnegie Unit

The origins of this sacrosanct schedule can be traced back to 1892. That's when the National Education Association appointed a Committee of Ten to examine the teaching of high school subjects. According to Robert Canady and Michael Rettig (1995), the committee's report was the seed for the formation of the rigidly structured high school schedule as we know it today. The report encouraged every high school to focus the work of each student on five or six academic areas in each of the four high school years.

Standardization of secondary education wasn't immediate, however. Grolier's Encyclopedia cites the 1901 standardization of college-entrance exams as a determining factor. Charles Eliot, who had previously headed the Committee of Ten, later became chairman of the board of trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He persuaded educators to agree on a unit consisting of 120 hours of instruction, typically delivered in 40- to 60-minute segments throughout the year.

The Carnegie unit was embraced, nationwide, as a convenient, mechanical measure of academic progress and has remained remarkably unchanged over the years, with the exception of experiments with flexible

modular scheduling in the '60s and early '70s. Modular scheduling typically included large blocks of unscheduled student time that resulted in an escalation of discipline problems. Ultimately, most high schools returned to traditional schedules.

What's Wrong with the Traditional School Schedule?

"Nothing is wrong with the Carnegie-based schedule except that it prevents teachers from teaching well and students from learning well," states Joseph Carroll (1994).

For starters, the pace is grueling. A typical student will be in nine locations pursuing nine different activities in a six-and-a-half-hour school day. An average teacher must teach five classes, dealing with 125 to 180 students and multiple preparations. This frantic, fragmented schedule is unlike any experienced either before or after high school.

"It produces a hectic, impersonal, inefficient instructional environment," says Carroll, provides inadequate time for probing ideas in depth, and tends to discourage using a variety of learning activities. Few teachers are given sufficient preparation time to collaborate with colleagues or design learning experiences that will help students derive their own meaning from learning. Opportunities for individualization of instruction and meaningful interaction between students and teachers are hard to come by.

> Schedules should be regarded as flexible time-management tools that evolve to best serve the educational needs of students.
>
> Source: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1990)

No matter how complex or simple the school subject, the schedule assigns an impartial national average of 51 minutes per class period, say Robert Canady and Michael Rettig (1995). And despite a wide variation in the time it takes individual students to succeed at learning any given task, the allocated time is identical for all. The 1994 report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning states, "Schools will have a design flaw as long as their organization is based on the assumption that all students can learn on the same schedule."

In addition, since most disciplinary problems occur during scheduled transitions, the more transitions, the more problems. And a great deal of time is lost in simply starting and ending so many classes in a day.

"Traditional, inflexible scheduling is based on administrative and institutional needs," say Gary Watts and and Shari Castle (1993). Flexible scheduling patterns are a much better match for pedagogical practices that meet the educational needs of students and the professional needs of teachers.

Revamping the Educational System

Gordon Cawelti (1994), in his national study of high school restructuring, cites the following criticisms of American high schools:

- Low student achievement, both on tests of basic skills and on tests of general knowledge of core subjects.
- The need to move beyond only teaching basic skills and factual information to developing higher order intellectual skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Curriculum fragmentation, which prevents students from seeing the connections between school subjects and real life.
- The impersonality of large high schools, in which many students feel little or no sense of belonging to the institution.
- The failure to offer learning experiences that provide students with skills needed for transition to meaningful jobs in the work world after graduation.
- The predominance of students as passive learners and the failure to actively engage them in the learning process.
- Failure to provide the challenging curriculum needed by language-minority students and a culturally diverse student population.

Curing these ills requires a major overhaul of the system. In a word, "restructuring." Hundreds of schools nationwide have found block scheduling to be a key ingredient in their restructuring process. Many have found that the above-listed problems tend to diminish in significance when teachers and students can work together for larger blocks of time.

Ellie Ashford, in a 1995 issue of the *School Board News*, cites the following accolades from around the country:

- Tim Moore, a consultant for high school restructuring at the Kentucky Department of Education, says block scheduling is the "number one item in high school restructuring in the state. It's also taking hold in South Carolina, Virginia, Texas, and North Carolina, notes Moore.
- Block scheduling is "a wave sweeping the nation," says David Hottenstein, a high school principal in Pennsylvania. "It makes sense. It leads to a more positive academic environment," and data from his school show improved academic performance.
- The extended blocks allow teachers to develop stronger relationships with students, says John Lammell, director of high school services at the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "There's a better climate for learning."

Chapter 1

What Is Block Scheduling?

Cawelti (1994) defines *block scheduling* as follows: "At least part of the daily schedule is organized into larger blocks of time (more than 60 minutes) to allow flexibility for a diversity of instructional activities."

Variations and permutations are endless, and may involve reconfiguring the lengths of terms as well as the daily schedule. Some of the possibilities detailed by Canady and Rettig (1995) include:

- Four 90-minute blocks per day, school year divided into two semesters; former year-long courses completed in one semester.
- Alternate day block schedule: six or eight courses spread out over two days; teachers meet with half of their students each day.
- Two large blocks and three standard-sized blocks per day. Year divided into 60-day trimesters with a different subject taught in the large blocks each trimester.
- Some classes (such as band, math, typing, foreign language) taught daily, others in longer blocks on alternate days.
- Six courses, each meeting in three single periods, and one double period per week.
- Seven courses. Teachers meet with students three days out of four—twice in single periods, once in a double period.
- The 75-15-75-15 plan (see table 1)

Most schools start with one of these patterns and modify it to meet their specific needs.

To illustrate some possible configurations, table 2 gives four examples taken from Oregon high schools.

Table 1: 75-15-75-15 PLAN

	Fall Term 75 Days	Middle Term 15 Days	Spring Term 75 Days	End Term 15 Days
Block I Per. 1 & 2 112 min	Science	Enrichment, Elective, Community Service, Remedial Work, etc.	English	Enrichment, Elective, Community Service, Remedial Work, etc.
Block II Per. 3 & 4 112 min	Health/ Physical Education		Art	
Period 5/L 48 min+24 for lunch	Band & Lunch	Band & Lunch	Band & Lunch	Band & Lunch
Block III Per. 6 & 7 112 min	Math	Enrichment, Elective, Community Service, etc.	Social Science	Enrichment, Elective, Community Service, etc.

Source: Canady and Rettig (1995). Reprinted with permission from Eye on Education, P.O. Box 3113, Princeton, NJ 08543. (609) 395-0005.

Table 2: Block Schedules in Four High Schools

Hood River Valley's Two-Week Daily Schedule: Alternate A & B Days

Week 1	Mon. A	Tues. B	Wed. A	Thurs. A	Fri. A
8:15-9:44	1	5	1	5	1
9:51-11:20	2	6	2	6	2
11:20-12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:00-1:29	3	7	3	7	3
1:36-3:05	4	8	4	8	4
Week 2	Mon. B	Tues. A	Wed. B	Thurs. A	Fri. B
8:15-9:44	5	1	5	1	5
9:51-11:20	6	2	6	2	6
11:20-12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:00-1:29	7	3	7	3	7
1:36-3:05	8	4	8	4	8

La Grande High School's Full Block Schedule, with Wednesday Flex

Regular Bell Schedule

Block 1	8-9:28
Block 2	9:36-11:04
Lunch	11:04-12:02
Block 3	12:02-1:30
Block 4	1:38-3:06

1st & 3rd Weds. — Teacher Access		2nd & 4th Weds.—Faculty Forum	
Teacher Access	7:30-9:00	Faculty Forum	7:30-9:30
Block 1	9:08-10:14	Block 1	10:04-11:00
Block 2	10:22-11:28	Lunch	11:00—11:58
Lunch	11:28-12:26	Block 2	11:58-12:54
Block 3	12:26-1:42	Block 3	1:02-1:58
Block 4	1:50-3:06	Block 4	2:06-3:02

Mountain View High School's Block Schedule with Tutorial/Lunch

A Block	7:30-8:55	85 minutes
Break	8:55-9:15	15 minutes
B Block	9:15-10:35	85 minutes
Tutorial/	10:35-10:55	20 minutes
Lunch	10:55-11:35	40 minutes
C Block	11:35-1:00	85 minutes
D Block	1:15-2:40	85 minutes

B & D blocks could be one full semester course or two 9-week courses.

A & C Blocks could be one full semester course or two 9-week courses which rotated every other day.

Tillamook High School's Modified Block Schedule

Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
Teacher Planning Time	Period 1 8:10-8:53	Period 1 8:10-9:41	Period 2 8:10-9:41	Period 1 8:10-8:53
Period 1 9:35-10:08	Period 2 8:58-9:41			Period 2 8:58—9:41
Period 2 10:13-10:46	Period 3 9:46-10:29	Period 3 9:46-11:17	Period 4 9:46-11:17	Period 3 9:46-10:29
Period 3 10:51-11:24	Period 4 10:34-11:17			Period 4 10:34-11:17
Lunch 11:24-11:54	Lunch 11:17-11:52	Lunch 11:17-11:52	Lunch 11:17-11:52	Lunch 11:17-11:52
Period 4 11:59-12:32	Period 5 11:57-12:40	Period 5 11:57-1:28	Period 6 11:57-1:28	Period 5 11:57-12:40
Period 5 12:37-1:10	Period 6 12:45-1:28			Period 6 12:45-1:28
Period 6 1:15-1:48	Period 7 1:33-2:16	Period 7 1:33-3:04	Period 8 1:33-3:04	Period 7 1:33-2:16
Period 7 1:53-2:26				
Period 8 2:31-3:04	Period 8 2:21-3:04			Period 8 2:21-3:04
5 min passing	5 min passing	5 min passing	5 min passing	5 min passing
30 min lunch	35 min lunch	35 min lunch	35 min lunch	35 min lunch
33 min classes	43 min classes	91 min classes	91 min classes	43 min classes

No treatment of block scheduling would be complete without mentioning The Copernican Plan, espoused by Joseph Carroll (1990). It includes even larger blocks of time. In his first alternative, students enroll in only one four-hour class each day for a period of 30 days. Each student would enroll in six of these classes a year, thus fulfilling the required 180 school days. In the second alternative, students enroll in two two-hour courses at a time, for 60 days. A school could schedule both 30-day and 60-day courses simultaneously, as in the diagram in table 3.

Table 3: Two Proposed Schedules for the Copernican Plan

Time	Schedule A	Schedule B
7:46	Macroclass (226 min.) for 30 days	Macroclass I (110 min.) for 60 days
9:36		
9:42		Passing (6 min.)
11:32		Macroclass II (110 min.) for 60 days
11:38	Passing (6 min.)	
12:13	First Lunch (35 min.)	Seminar I/Music/ Phys. Ed. (70 min.)
12:48	Seminar II/Music/ Phys. Ed. (70 min.)	
1:23		Second Lunch (35 min.)
1:29	Passing (6 min.)	
2:39	Preparation/Help/Study/Phys. Ed./Music (70 min.)	
2:45	Departure (6 min.)	
5:00	Activities/Sports (135 min.)	

Source: Carroll (1990). Reprinted with permission from Joseph Carroll.

One other scheduling suggestion from Canady and Rettig involves periodically altering the regular schedule to allow each class to meet for a full school day. In a six-period school, for example, teachers would meet with each of their five classes for a full day, then have a full day out of the classroom for planning or professional development.

Clearly, once you focus a creative eye on the school schedule, countless intriguing possibilities elbow each other out of the way to present themselves.

Chapter 2

The Advantages of Block Scheduling

For the most part, contends Ronald Williamson (1993), the advantages of the block time schedule are philosophic and programmatic. The disadvantages are primarily related to logistics.

Opportunities for Varied Teaching Strategies and Indepth Learning

The major value of extended periods, says Cawelti, is that they enable teachers to use a variety of teaching activities and allow students to probe ideas in greater depth. Students can learn facts and concepts, then do a project that applies this information to real life. This combination transforms them from passive learners doing "seat time" to active learners who perform meaningful tasks related to real life.

For example, say Canady and Rettig (1993), a math teacher might deliver direct instruction for 25 to 30 minutes, review concepts in cooperative-learning groups, travel to the computer lab for reinforcement, and provide individual students with personalized reteaching, practice, or enrichment, all within the same block. Or a home-economics teacher can give students cooking projects that take more than a half hour. Students can actually take the time to savor and analyze the results of their culinary efforts. Under the old schedule, setup and cleanup activities took close to half the period.

> There are those magical moments for teachers when you truly have the kids' interest and you really are in touch. If you can design classes to have more of those moments, you really have something.
>
> *Source*: Jay Hummell, principal of Ontario High School, Ontario, Oregon

In an article by Ellie Ashford (1995), Donald Rotsma, head of the

science and industrial-arts department at Galena High School in Reno, Nevada, says, "We can introduce a subject, do a whole lab, and come back and discuss it." Under the old schedule, "you barely had time to complete a lab, then had to wait until the next day to discuss what happened. By then, the experiment wasn't so fresh any more."

Ron Hudson, principal of Madison High School in Portland, Oregon, noted that students can now take field trips without missing other classes, and when they have guest speakers, there's plenty of time for questions and answers.

Above all, note Mary Salvaterra and Don Adams (1995), extended class time gives teachers greater flexibility. When a "teachable moment" occurs, teachers can seize it without the usual pangs of guilt associated with deviating from the scheduled topic. The teacher's role can shift from that of a director of learning, using lectures, to that of a facilitator of learning. Traditional rows of desks can give way to clusters, horseshoe arrangements, and other configurations designed to facilitate projects and small-group discussion. Students can go to the library to work as a group on research projects. The library becomes more than a place to send students during study hall.

Improvement in School Climate, Student Conduct, and Dropout Rate

A more relaxed school climate is reported by most, if not all, schools experimenting with block scheduling. Teachers and students are under less stress, dealing with fewer subjects and classes each day. And since most discipline problems occur during class changes, it follows that fewer class changes mean fewer discipline problems.

Of equal, if not greater, importance, students see fewer teachers each term or day, and teachers see fewer students. This gives teachers a chance to develop greater rapport, to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, and to individualize their teaching strategies to better meet students' needs. Many schedules include some kind of regularly scheduled tutorial or teacher-access time that makes it easier for students to seek help for academic or personal problems. When students are known and appreciated by staff, school becomes less depersonalized. Students are more likely to believe it is possible and worthwhile to work out their problems. Numerous Oregon principals and vice-principals noted that teachers who worked with students for longer periods were better able to deal with classroom discipline problems than on the previous time schedule.

In a two-year study, a team of researchers from Harvard University found significant improvement in Copernican schools when it measured

attendance, suspension, and dropout rates (Joseph Carroll 1994):

- The impact on attendance was positive, but not spectacular. Four schools showed improved attendance, two showed declines, and one showed no change.
- Four of five high schoools that provided suspension data showed reductions in the rate of suspension ranging from 25 percent to 75 percent during the first year of the study. One school reported an 11 percent increase.
- Dropout rates were reduced significantly. Six of seven high schools reported reductions ranging from 17 percent to 63 percent. Three of these six high schools had had serious retention problems before, losing from a quarter to half their students before graduation. The median change for the seven schools was a 37 percent reduction in the first year under a Copernican schedule.

Increase in Instructional Time

Canady and Rettig (1993) note that instructional time increases. Fewer transitions account for some of the gain, along with fewer time-consuming class beginnings and endings. This is particularly important for classes that require considerable time for setup and cleanup, such as laboratory sciences, fine arts, technology classes, home economics, and physical education.

Canady and Rettig (1993) believe the 75-75-30 plan—two 75-day terms in the fall and winter, followed by one 30-day spring term—offers the greatest benefits.

In some cases, reconfiguring the schedule can allow teachers to teach more classes in a school year than previously. That happened at Hatboro-Horsham Senior High in Horsham, Pennsylvania, according to Gerald Strock and David Hottenstein (1994). Faced with increased enrollment, the district would have had to hire additional teachers. That need was eliminated or postponed due to the new schedule.

More Opportunities for Acceleration, Remediation, Individualization

If students take four classes each semester, they can earn up to 32 credits in the four years of high school, notes Clarence Edwards, Jr. (1993). These additional credits coupled with an eight-course sequence would allow the curriculum to be updated. It usually also increases the number of students taking upper-level classes and earning advanced-studies diplomas. Or a student can complete all foundation courses in the first two years of high school, then devote the third and fourth years to college preparatory

coursework or a full two-year technical or vocational program.

Students at numerous Oregon schools have taken the opportunity to graduate early, accumulate college credits (at no cost) by taking dual-credit advanced-placement classes, or acquire work experience through internships in the community.

On the other end of the spectrum, some students need more time to learn. Many programs with extended blocks include regular student/teacher access time, allowing students to get extra help without arriving early or staying late. Oregon schools that incorporate access time into their schedules include Bend High School, Madison High School, Mountain View High School, La Grande High School, and Ontario High School.

Another possibility is reconfiguring curriculum to accommodate differences in learning time. In an article titled "The Power of Innovative Scheduling (1995)," Canady and Rettig describe an algebra program that takes learning differences into account. Four sections of Algebra I are scheduled into the same period or block and the curriculum is divided into four distinct segments. Students are heterogeneously grouped and all begin together with teachers A, B, C, and D. After completing the first quarter, students who need more time to master the material are grouped into a separate section that repeats the first part. Three teachers continue with the rest of the students. At the end of each quarter, teachers determine whether a regrouping is necessary. When a group needs to repeat any part, different teaching approaches are used. For example, instructors may utilize software in the computer lab or have one of the other teachers present the material.

Another method of individualizing, described by Joseph Carroll (1990), is to group students by ability within a class. In whole-group instruction, it is difficult to teach a class with a broad range of abilities. When divided into small groups, students can work at subject matter geared to their level of understanding and ability. The class can be broken into any number of groups, each group doing a related task. Final products can be shared with the whole class.

In their book on block scheduling, Canady and Rettig (1995) note that particularly under the 75-75-30 plan they favor, students are able to repeat a failed course during the regular school year. In the traditional schedule, students must wait until summer or the beginning of the next school year to repeat a class. Thus, during the second term, when many students realize that it is mathematically impossible to pass a course, they stop working and become behavior problems. In the 75-75-30 model, they could retake the course during winter or spring term.

Teachers can also reach more of their students when they have the time to incorporate a variety of techniques and learning strategies, and to take different student learning styles into account.

Academic Improvement

The data on this issue are still too sketchy to be statisically valid, but in general, says John O'Neal (1995), research has shown that students in block schedules do at least as well on measures of academic achievement as students in traditional schedules. Below is a sampling of success stories—schools where students have scored measurably higher.

Carroll (1994) said a team of evaluators from Harvard studying seven schools found that increases in academic mastery ranged from 0 to 46 percent. The median increase was 18 percent.

Wasson High School, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, adopted block scheduling in 1990. Since then, according to O'Neal, the percentage of pupils making the honor roll or going on to four-year colleges and the number of course credits earned by students were all higher.

In 1992, Independence High School in Columbus, Ohio, went on a trimester schedule with three two-hour instructional blocks per day. About 15 percent of the students made the honor roll in the old nine-week grading period. That proportion has since increased to 40 percent or more, according to a report by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994).

Jeffrey Sturgis (1995) notes that student achievement at Leavitt Area High School in Turner, Maine, has risen steadily since the school went to a block schedule three years ago, as measured by the Maine Educational Assessment.

And at Mountain View High School, in Oregon, the average SAT score has climbed from about 900 to almost 1,000 since 1991. Oregon schools as a whole have not experienced significantly higher or lower GPA or SAT scores as a result of moving to a block schedule.

Positive Impact on Teachers

Teachers whose subject matter works well in extended time blocks feel much more relaxed and creative teaching fewer classes per day with plenty of time to try new strategies. They consistently report enjoying the opportunity of getting to know their students better and being able to cover topics in more depth and from several different angles. For those who embrace the changes, teaching has become more fun, and when teachers enjoy their jobs, students reap the benefits.

Another aspect of improved school climate is that teachers often feel less isolated. Salvaterra and Adams found that teachers who adapt well after changing to extended blocks collaborate and share ideas more. Rather than complaining about problems associated with the change, teachers begin

viewing challenges and obstacles as issues to address through dialogue with other professionals. Interdisciplinary teams may work together to plan and teach interrelated materials. If they team teach, they can observe each other and give feedback. Opportunities to share information and insights allow teachers to develop a sense of interdependence that creates an intellectual catalyst for professional growth.

Oregon schools that have adopted a block schedule consistently report that classroom preparation and planning take more time than they did before. Some see that as a drawback, but it could be viewed positively. *Prisoners of Time*, the 1994 report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, states: "Building good teaching practices, like building anything of great worth, requires a substantial investment of time."

Chapter 3

Challenges and Problems

If block scheduling is so wonderful, why isn't everyone adopting it? The main reason is that change is difficult, time-consuming, and often painful.

"Changing the traditional plan usually involves stepping on people's toes," observes Edward Miller (1992). What's more, there are no formulas to predict the degree of pain a school will experience. On the other hand, dealing with the same problems year after year—alienation, passive learners, student and teacher burnout, high dropout and absenteeism rates, escalating violence, and discipline problems is painful. But educators are in a position similar to the proverbial frog that remains in a pot of water that is slowly heated to boiling. They have gradually grown accustomed to these problems and may fail to realize they can jump out of the pot. Or redesign the pot.

Failure to recognize the need to change is the biggest initial obstacle to implementing block scheduling. Subsequent challenges include finding the time to work on restructuring, and training and support for teachers. Problems created by moving into block scheduling may include subject matter that's not a comfortable fit, retention of materials, and teachers who don't adapt.

Resistance to Change

Resistance is strongest when stakeholders are left out of the change process. One anonymous Oregon teacher said this happened at her school. Changing to a block schedule was the principal's idea, she said. He involved a handful of teachers in the plans, but they quickly realized they were only token members of the planning team. She was among the few teachers who did visit other schools. All who saw block scheduling in action became convinced that it was worth trying, but the format for bringing the other teachers along was inadequate. Those who didn't visit other schools focused

primarily on how difficult it was going to be to change. They became angry and hostile. Many are still bitter, and the principal who initiated the change has moved on.

"Imposing a scheduling model on a school will not ensure its success" is the conclusion of a literature search by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1990). "Careful and thorough planning is essential. There cannot be too many questions asked during the planning process, and it is vital that representatives of all constituents of the school community be involved in the planning stages."

Jerry Peacock, principal of Baker High School, put it well. "First and foremost, you better have your staff involved from day one and make the decision as a group. You are taking people so far out of their comfort zone to try something new that they've got to buy it." The same holds true for school board members, parents, and students. It's important to set up forums for giving them information, allowing them to ask questions and to express their fears and reservations.

Gerald Strock and David Hottenstein (1994) say that in their conservative school district, the superintendent took the lead in establishing a climate for change. The community at large and many parents were satisfied with the system as it existed and saw no urgent need for change. "The system worked for them when they were in school, so they believed it should work for the current school population," note the authors. The job of the superintendent and principal was to help parents accept a paradigm shift. To facilitate this, they held numerous meetings where it was emphasized that all programs, no matter how effective, can be improved, and that negative changes (larger class sizes, cuts in programs, and possibly poor academic results) would occur if positive changes weren't made.

Formulating a shared vision is an excellent starting point. At La Grande High School, the staff settled on this vision: "To create a more humane and productive relationship among students, teachers and community members through the creative and flexible use of time, curriculum and facilities." And this goal: "To empower our students to become successful adults." Shared visions and goals such as these can help stakeholders to focus on working toward positive change, rather than resisting it because it presents so many challenges.

As a step toward agreeing on a vision, Kenneth Tewel (1991) suggests having the stakeholders work together to answer the following three questions:

- Who are the students? In addition to age, grade, family background, and achievement scores, look at learning styles and competency in curricular areas; responsibility and commitment to learning; physical abilities and emotional health; interests and aptitudes;

special talents; and career and educational goals.

- What do you want the students to learn? This includes educational outcomes with a description of what must happen educationally to qualify a student for graduation. Consensus of faculty and other stakeholders is important.
- How can the school best provide for the learning that will get the desired outcomes? If participants answer by listing the current course offerings and curriculum arrangements, encourage them to think again.

Once initial resistance is overcome, the results may be surprising. Strock and Hottenstein note, "One of the most rewardng outcomes of our restructuring is that students, parents, and staff are more open to change now, and much more receptive to additional changes that will occur. Our staff has been rejuvenated. Veteran teachers have changed their approaches, classrooms are more student-centered, and teacher effectiveness and morale at the high school never have been better."

On the other hand, it's likely that not everyone will be pleased. In most schools, there are teachers who never embrace the change. Salvaterra and Adams, in their observations of two schools changing to block scheduling, noted that teachers who failed to change their teaching methods were uniformly frustrated with the longer blocks of time. They complained that preparation took more time than previously. While many of their colleagues grew closer through collaborating and sharing ideas, "those who resisted began to withdraw, inhibiting professional dialogue and collaborative problem solving."

Finding Time To Plan and Prepare for Changes

"It's About Time!!," a report by the National Education Association (1993), states:

> The primary dilemma is that school personnel require time to restructure while restructuring time. Redesigning schools is not something educators can or should be asked to do in their "spare time." Staff must be provided more development time and greater authority to control the use of that time. Resolution of the time issue remains one of the most critical problems confronting educators today.

As is apparent in a later section of this Bulletin that details the experiences of Oregon educators, there are as many ways to set aside time for planning as there are types of block schedules. This is an area where support from the school board and superintendent is crucial, since the process usually involves reallocating time that would normally be spent teaching. Options

suggested by Watts and Castle, or used by Oregon educators, include:

- Periodically close down school for a day.
- Pay teachers for extra days before school starts.
- Start school several hours later a couple times a month.
- Dismiss students earlier on selected days.
- Give teachers stipends to work a number of days during the summer.
- Hire substitutes on a regular basis.
- Reduce the teaching load by one class for a term.
- Have administrators take over classes occasionally.
- Have teachers team teach, allowing one to cover for another.
- Set up occasional study halls supervised by aides.

Teachers often experience guilt when they are out of the classroom, state Watts and Castle. They want input into the change process but they want to be with their students during the school day. After all, that's what makes them teachers, isn't it? We live in a time of rapid change. The authors point out that teachers now must assume more roles than in the past. While teaching students is still the major focus of teachers' jobs, at most schools they are now also expected to participate in planning and decision-making, and to be constantly upgrading their information and skills. All this takes time.

After the decision is made to begin teaching in longer blocks of time, teachers will continue to need extra time, both for training and planning. Canady and Rettig (1995) state that what teachers most want and appreciate "is to work with someone who is succeeding in the trenches in their subject." In addition, they need extensive training and practice in cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, and integration of curriculum. A report of the National Education Association states that teachers also need regular, frequent, and sustained collegial interaction with each other. "Research concludes," says the report, "that collaborative time among teachers and other school personnel is essential in sustaining reflectiveness and collective self-examination so necessary for effective functioning, self-renewal, and reform."

Problems with Longer Time Blocks

Math, music, and language teachers are often unhappy with block scheduling. In a sampling of Oregon educators, administrators said teachers in all three of these disciplines argue that students do best with shorter

periods and consistent, year-round instruction.

With block scheduling, time gaps as long as eight months may pass between Algebra I and Algebra II, or between Spanish I and Spanish II. By then, students need extensive review before they can go on. And if they are to cover the same amount of material in a semester as they do in a year, they need to teach what amounts to two lessons per class. This can cause information overload, forcing students to move on to a new lesson before they've had time to fully assimilate the previous one. And students who take their math classes in the first semester may have forgotten a great deal by the time spring competitions and testing come along. Some teachers have handled this by giving brushup seminars before competitions.

Music teachers argue that their students, especially those who play horns, can't play for eighty minutes. "Their lips pucker up on them," noted one Oregon principal. Music teachers have year-round competitions to think about, and most schools put on performances several times a year.

Given that the first responsibility of a teacher is to her or his students, these legitimate criticisms must be addressed. Teachers who feel constrained from giving their students what they need will surely be frustrated. "During any change," state Salvaterra and Adams, "stakeholders need to feel that their basic needs are being recognized."

Many schools have set up split blocks in response to these very real problems. Some have integrated math and science curriculums. Some music teachers have adapted by meeting students at lunch or during early-bird classes. And to combat the problem of musician burnout, they've incorporated more music theory into their coursework. Edward Miller (1992) said administrators he's talked with emphasize the importance of constantly reexamining the choices that have been made. Many schools go through a number of permutations before they find the schedule that works best for them.

Another major problem with long time blocks is teachers who refuse to change their teaching style. Joseph Carroll (October 1994) said that many critics predicted, and parents worried, that students wouldn't be able to maintain their concentration for longer class periods. For the most part, however, problems with concentration have only arisen when teachers have refused to integrate a variety of teaching approaches into their classes. As one Oregon student astutely put it, "Ninety minutes of lecture is more than twice as boring as forty-five minutes of lecture." Students should not have to sit down and do the same thing for ninety minutes. Frequent transitions to new activities are necessary to keep students' minds and bodies refreshed. Providing teachers with the training and support they need to change will alleviate this problem for the majority of teachers.

Two additional problems are worth noting: students who get behind

and schedules that complicate students' commitments and activities outside school.

Several Oregon educators mentioned the problem of students who get behind. If a student misses a week of a compressed schedule, that's tantamount to missing two weeks on a traditional schedule. The tutorial and student/teacher access times adopted by many Oregon schools help students deal with this problem to some degree, but a student who misses more than a day or two of school may still find catching up quite stressful. Fortunately, one of the clear benefits of block scheduling is a reduction in student absenteeism.

One anonymous parent of a high school senior complained that the A/B rollover schedule at his son's school was frustrating for both the boy and his family. Most of his high school credit requirements had been met, so on the old schedule he could have attended morning classes and been free in the afternoon, or vice-versa. He could have used that time to take some classes at the local community college, to help out with child care at home, or to work for a local business. But because his schedule changed every week, he was unable to make any permanent commitments during school hours.

Agriculture and biology teachers have also complained that a compressed schedule, limited to one semester in a year, doesn't allow them to teach through the year's cycle of seasonal changes.

Chapter 4

Elements of Successful Change

Most of the steps and principles that must be followed to make a transition to block scheduling as stress-free as possible are evident in various chapters of this Bulletin. Nonetheless, it may prove useful to have them all in one place for easy reference.

These ideas are drawn primarily from two sources: Donald Hackman's (1995) "Ten Guidelines for Implementing Block Scheduling" and R. Daniel Cunningham Jr., and Sue Ann Nogle's (1996) "Implementing a Semesterized Block Schedule: Six Key Elements."

Promote teacher, student, parent, and community ownership. A committee of teachers should visit schools that are currently using the schedule. Many districts also include students and parents on their visitation teams. Jan Donnelly, principal of Hood River Valley High School, highly recommends including members of all stakeholder groups. The involvement of teachers is most crucial. They should be active participants in deciding upon a new schedule and molding it to fit the needs of the school. Administrators and teachers should set up forums for student and community involvement, providing these groups with information, answering their questions, and soliciting their feedback.

Employ a systems-thinking approach. Don't jump on the block-scheduling bandwagon just to keep up with the Jones' High School. One way to start is to form a study group to read and discuss literature on systems thinking and educational change. Hackman recommends *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge 1990) and *Change Forces* (Fullan 1993). Different schools will have different reasons for considering a change.

Secure and maintain the support of your superiors. Changing the schedule may go against longstanding district norms. It may affect the bus schedule or budgeting components, deviate from negotiated contracts, or

change staffing and building needs. Therefore, it is imperative that schools first obtain tentative approval from their district office and school board. Once the research and planning processes begin, keep them posted and encourage feedback. This could prevent you from wasting countless hours developing a schedule that will not be supported.

Provide adequate time for planning. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory recommends allowing two years to provide adequate exploration of options and evaluation of how those options will meet the needs of the school. Many districts have done it in one year and felt that was adequate.

Brainstorm creative alternatives. Resist the opportunity to adopt another school's model. Encourage students and teachers to "think outside the box" by asking open-ended questions such as "What would we like to do that our current schedule does not allow?" Some schools try out pilot schedules, maybe changing a couple days of the week or part of a school year, to see how a certain schdule might play out in real life before committing to it for a year.

Provide adequate staff development opportunities. Cunningham and Nogle suggest beginning with some kind of faculty survey. "Since staff development is an on-going process, rather than a single-day inservice program, the focus of staff development should be on identifying effective teaching techniques as well as long and short-term planning." They also recommend surveying students to find out what they think is needed. Students can tell you what works and what doesn't work.

Provide teachers with extra time for revamping their curriculum. Teachers must rethink what they are going to teach and how they are going to do it. Time for adequate planning is essential before and during the school year. It can take the form of individual planning time, departmental planning time, or cross-curricular planning time. It can take place formally, on inservice days, or informally with teachers getting together for lunch. If possible, principals should find ways to compensate teachers when planning takes time outside the teachers' work day or during the summer. Concern about compensation conveys administrative support and sends the message that the entire staff is in this together.

Set up ongoing opportunities to share problems and challenges. Forums for discussion need to take place on a regular basis, for teachers, for students, for parents and community members as well. Frequent communication promotes the idea that everyone is involved in the change process and encourages stakeholders to think of change as an ongoing process, always focused on improving student learning.

Evaluate. Before beginning the program, determine the indicators you will use to measure student success. To be significant, these indicators must

be compared to baseline data from previous years.

Typically these data include student discipline referrals, attendance information, dropout rates, graduation rates, student enrollment in upper-level courses, grade-point averages, standardized-test scores, honor-roll data, self-esteem indicators, and feedback from teacher, student, and parent surveys. Most schools collect these data already, except for the last two. Once the new schedule is in place, gather and share data about student achievement. Surveys of parents, students, and faculty members can also be used to gauge the attitudes and opinions of all involved.

Share and celebrate successes. Students and their parents will be delighted to hear that the change has improved attitudes or decreased dropout rates. Most of them will only be aware of how it's affecting their family. Teachers, too, sometimes get so bogged down in the first year, working long hours to rewrite lesson plans, that they fail to notice positive changes, such as improved building climate or decreased discipline problems. They may even fail to recognize their own professional growth as they struggle to meet the new challenges of their job. Hackman advises administrators to "take advantage of every opportunity to publicly praise the faculty for their hard work, especially during the first year of implementation."

Chapter 5

Block Scheduling in Oregon High Schools

Impressed by the research and literature, many Oregon high schools are putting flexible scheduling theories to the true test, implementing them in their own schools. These interviews with Oregon educators offer a snapshot of scheduling experiments in this state.

No two schools have gone about it in quite the same way, and each has custom-tailored a schedule to meet the needs of its school community. All reported a more relaxed atmosphere on days with extended blocks. Some seemed content with their schedules as they stand, while others described problems that still need working out. Two have returned to traditional scheduling.

Anonymous Triple A School

A teacher from a small AAA school had harsh criticisms of the transition into block scheduling at her school. She spoke on the condition that she and her school remain anonymous.

At the beginning of the 1993-94 school year, the principal asked the teacher if she'd be willing to observe block scheduling at another school. She agreed, not realizing that she had joined a committee with three other teachers and the principal. Almost everything the visiting teachers observed was positive, except for some comments from music teachers who said it didn't benefit them much. But the music teachers endured the schedule because they felt that, overall, block scheduling was better for their students.

But when the teachers returned to their own school, the tone changed:

> We didn't hit the negative part until we got back to our school. I don't know if we were more reluctant to change than most schools, but it

was almost a feeling of panic among the faculty. Elective teachers were absolutely sure it was going to destroy their programs. Our administrator had a really hard time communicating. He would either disallow discussion, or he would allow it and then ignore it. A good part of our faculty felt cut off from the decision-making process. Several faculty meetings got pretty ugly. After these, we had a very structured meeting where everyone had to speak once, but couldn't talk about it afterwards. That kept the bickering down.

Then we had an evening pizza feed. Interested faculty could show up and most of them did. We came up with a teachers' counterproposal, a modification of the proposal that the principal had ramrodded through. The four of us teachers on the "committee" were just kind of the fall guys. We didn't really have much say in the process.

We left that meeting feeling that the teachers' proposal was well-accepted. Before long we realized that it wasn't being considered, but nobody came out and told us it wasn't going to happen. By the end of the school year, we realized it was going the principal's way. We still have a lot of teachers who are very bitter.

Training and preparation were minimal. Teachers were told they would be going to longer blocks, so they might want to look into it on their own during the summer. Just before school started, three of school's faculty members presented a one-day inservice training, encouraging teachers to shift activities at least three times during a long block.

In spite of the rocky start and the whole nine yards, the majority of teachers found out they loved it. A fourth of our faculty would like to do some fine-tuning but you'd be hard pressed to find three teachers in our building who would go back to a seven-period day. There was definitely an increase in the amount of prep we needed to do in the first two years. It made good teachers better and bad teachers worse. The students are overwhelmingly happy with it.

To ease the transition, she offers this advice:

Start a year in advance. Involve parents and teachers from day one. Give everybody concerned some facts and some time to stew. As many people as possible need to go out and see it and talk to other teachers. At our school the ones who never left the building never got outside their own little realm of worries, didn't become positive about it or accept it until they saw it work in their own building. Students need to do school visitations, too. You definitely need training more than a day in advance. And don't ask for other people's opinions if you're not going to consider them.

Despite all the difficulties, however, she said she'd go through it again. "I wouldn't give up block scheduling for the world."

Baker High School

Baker High School, headed by Principal Jerry Peacock, is in its first year on a block schedule. Located in northeastern Oregon, this 40-teacher, 715-student school chose an 8-period rollover. Reflecting the school's colors, the school has purple days and gold days. Periods 1-4 meet on purple days; periods 5-8 meet on gold days. School starts at 8:05 a.m., ends at 3:10 p.m. Periods are 90 minutes, lunch is 45, passing is 5.

Peacock said the Oregon Educational Act for the Twenty-First Century was the major impetus for change at Baker. Specifically, he and his staff were looking for ways to integrate the curriculum and manage school-to-work transitions. They also wanted to develop and incorporate a broader variety of teaching strategies so they could more effectively serve students with a variety of learning styles. To accomplish these tasks, the staff discovered it had to take a close look at the school's delivery system.

"The traditional system did not lend itself to being creative with our curriculum," said Peacock.

The site council proposed to the board that staff be allowed 12 staff development afternoons to explore the reform act and plan appropriate changes to the school's delivery system. The board agreed. On selected Wednesdays during the 1994-95 school year, students were dismissed at 12:20 p.m. and teachers and classified staff met from 12:30 until 4 p.m.

"The first thing we had to do was to get to know each other a little better," recalled Peacock. So the staff started out with communications-skills training and practice. Then they surveyed themselves to determine what areas they needed to work on. Curriculum, school atmosphere, and public relations were three areas they targeted.

Peacock said they studied Oregon's reform act as a staff—the Certificate of Initial Mastery, Certificate of Advanced Mastery, and so forth. "Everything kept pointing to the need to change our delivery system," said Peacock. And from the conferences that he and others had attended and the journals they had read, some form of block scheduling seemed to be the way to go.

A committee of teachers and administrators visited Hood River. Smaller groups and individuals visited schools in Ontario, Albany, and Bend. Peacock talked with the principal of North Eugene High School. Teams visiting the various schools interviewed teachers, students, administrators, and community members. On staff development days, team members shared information, including the pros and cons of what they had seen and heard.

"Essentially, we tried to decide what would fit the needs of Baker High School," said Peacock. "We're a conservative community and there hadn't been any changes here in years and years and years. We chose the 8-period rollover because we felt we could work with that."

A Consensus for Change

The final decision was made by consensus. Peacock believes that fully involving staff members in the change process was very important to the school's success in making the change. He also believes that if changes are made in the schedule for the purpose of cutting personnel, the schedule is being altered for the wrong reason. "Going to the block should be done for instructional enrichment and to improve instruction," said Peacock.

In the spring, Peacock called each class into the auditorium, where he presented the schedule and pointed out its advantages. He had a parents' night as well. All in all, he encountered very little resistance. The board's supportive attitude may have helped diffuse opposition. Perhaps, he mused, that came from selling it so well to the board.

The hardest sell had to do with setting up what Peacock called "a release valve." He said, "If 10 of 40 teachers are on prep, that means you have 30 left in the system. If you have all 700 kids in that system, your numbers are going to be higher in some classes. You have to have a release valve to remove some of the kids from the system."

Home release and a study center were the solutions they proposed, allowing students to enroll either three or four periods per day. Students who opt for a three-period day can go home or to a study center for a fourth period. The board, concerned that this might create problems, allowed the staff to try it anyway.

Peacock said that problems related to students not being in class a full day have been minimal. About 100 students are taking four classes per day, a schedule he terms "grueling."

Seventy percent of the students and 77 percent of the staff like the new schedule better than the old one; it works particularly well in science, physical education, foreign language, and vocational classes. The stress level of the whole school is way down, Peacock noted.

"It's amazing how frenetic the traditional system is," said Peacock. "When you take a third of the classes away, you're not so rushed."

Preliminary Training

During the spring and summer preceding the change, teachers received training to prepare them for teaching longer class periods. Teachers from La Grande and Ontario shared their experiences and ideas with the Baker teachers. Additional training sessions have taken place on staff development afternoons throughout this year.

"It's coming out in teacher evaluations, how much more they've had to learn," said Peacock. "If you try to lecture for 90 minutes, you're going to be dead meat. All teachers this year are new teachers regardless of how many

BULLETIN IN BRIEF

OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL

Condensed from OSSC Bulletin

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Block Scheduling in High Schools

By Karen Irmsher

INTRODUCTION

We live in a very different world today, yet most contemporary high school students are still locked into the same schedule their great-grandparents had when they were teenagers.

Is that a problem? Many educators believe it is.

What's Wrong with the Traditional Schedule?

It produces a hectic, impersonal, inefficient instructional environment, provides inadequate time for probing ideas in depth, and discourages the use of varied learning activities. Teachers have insufficient preparation time to collaborate with colleagues or design meaningful learning experiences. Individualization and significant interactions between students and teachers are the exception, not the rule (Joseph Carroll 1994).

No matter how complex or simple the subject, all classes are the same length. And despite wide variation in students' individual learning times, everyone gets the same amount. A great deal of time is lost in starting and ending so many classes each day, and many educators say the schedule promotes passive learning, contributes to low student achievement, and fragments the curriculum.

Hundreds of schools nationwide believe block scheduling is a key ingredient in curing these ills.

The Oregon School Study Council—an organization of member school districts in the state—is a service of the College of Education, University of Oregon.

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WHAT IS BLOCK SCHEDULING?

In block scheduling, part or all of the daily schedule is organized into larger blocks of time (more than 60 minutes). Variations are endless and may involve reconfiguring the lengths of terms. Robert Canady and Michael Rettig (1995) and Carroll (1994) list many of the following possibilities:

- Four 90-minute blocks per day, school year divided into two semesters; former year-long courses completed in one semester.
- A/B rollover: six or eight courses spread out over two days; teachers meet with half their students each day.
- Two large blocks and three standard-sized blocks per day. Year divided into 60-day trimesters.
- Some classes daily, others in longer blocks on alternate days.
- Six courses, each meet in three single periods, and one double period per week.
- Seven courses. Classes meet three days out of four—twice in single periods, once in a double period.
- One class. Meets daily for 30 days. Students take six per year.

Most schools study the possibilities, then design their own.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BLOCK SCHEDULING

Some of the major benefits are listed below.

Opportunities for Varied Teaching Strategies and Indepth Learning. Extended class periods enable teachers to use a variety of teaching activities, and students to probe ideas in greater depth. Above all, note Mary Salvaterra and Don Adams (1995), extended class time gives teachers greater flexibility. The teacher's role can shift from that of a director of learning, using lectures, to that of a facilitator of learning.

Improvement in School Climate, Student Conduct, and Dropout Rate. A more relaxed school climate is reported by schools experimenting with block scheduling. Teachers and students are under less stress, dealing with fewer classes each day, and fewer class changes translate into fewer discipline problems. Teachers can develop greater rapport with students and individualize teaching strategies. When students feel known and appreciated, school becomes less depersonalized.

Increase in Instructional Time. Instructional time is increased. Less passing time accounts for some of the gain, along with fewer time-consuming class beginnings and endings. This is particularly important for classes that require considerable time for setup and cleanup.

More Opportunities for Acceleration, Remediation, Individualization. A student taking four classes each semester, or eight a year, can earn up to 32 credits in four years. Many take the opportunity to graduate early, accumulate free college credits, or acquire work experience through community internships. Students who take more time to learn can repeat failed courses more quickly.

Academic Improvement. In general, research has shown that students do at least as well on measures of academic achievement.

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS

So why isn't everyone on a block schedule? The main reason is that change is difficult, time-consuming, and often painful.

Resistance to Change. Failure to recognize the need to change is the biggest initial obstacle. This is strongest when the stakeholders are left out of the change process. "Imposing a scheduling model on a school will not ensure its success," concluded a literature search by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1990).

Finding Time to Plan and Prepare for Changes. This is an area where the support of the school board and superintendent become crucial, since the process usually involves reallocating time that would normally be spent teaching or in preparation. After the decision is made, teachers will continue to need extra time for training and planning (Gary Watts and Shari Castle 1993).

Problems with Longer Time Blocks. Math, music, and language teachers are often unhappy with block scheduling. Many Oregon educators said students do best in these disciplines with shorter periods and consistent, year-round instruction. Agriculture and biology teachers complained that a schedule limited to one semester in a year doesn't allow them to teach through the year's cycle of seasonal changes.

"During any change," stated Salvaterra and Adams, "stakeholders need to feel that their basic needs are being recognized."

Another major problem is teachers who refuse to change their teaching style.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL CHANGE

In addition to Oregon educators, primary sources for this list are Donald Hackman, R. Daniel Cunningham, Jr., and Sue Ann Nogle.

- Promote teacher, student, parent, and community ownership.
- Employ a systems-thinking approach.
- Secure and maintain the support of your superiors.
- Provide adequate time for planning.
- Brainstorm creative alternatives.
- Provide adequate staff development opportunities.
- Provide teachers with extra time for revamping their curriculum.
- Set up ongoing opportunities to share problems and challenges.
- Evaluate.
- Share and celebrate successes.

BLOCK SCHEDULING IN OREGON HIGH SCHOOLS

Interviews with educators in selected Oregon schools provide a snapshot of block scheduling experiments throughout the state.

Bend High School

This school went to an interim schedule in 1993, and a full block this school year. On the interim schedule, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays were seven-period days; periods 1,2, 5, and 7 met in 90-minute blocks on Wednesdays; and periods 2, 4, and 6 met on Thursdays. Then students were dismissed at 1:00 p.m., allowing teachers time for staff development.

This year, each day has four 85-minute classes and a 20-minute tutorial period, tucked between block B and the 45-minute lunch. Teachers stay in designated classrooms during tutorial, so students can talk with them. Blocks A and C are rotator classes, meeting every other day. Blocks B and D are quarter classes. Students can graduate earlier or retake classes they've had trouble with (Peter Miller, telephone interview, February 1996).

Elgin High School

This school looked at block scheduling as a means of holding on to a broad curriculum in the face of budget cuts. In 1993-94 they started with a modified block, and in 1994-95 expanded on that. Two 90-minute blocks start the morning, followed by three 45-minute blocks (one is lunch) and a 90-minute block. The short blocks allow students to take more electives.

Other benefits include a marked reduction in absenteeism and discipline problems. The biggest criticism from the community concerns students who aren't in class (mostly seniors). In response, the school is raising its standards for graduation.

Hood River Valley High School

This school has become Oregon's block scheduling mecca. Now in its fourth year on an A/B rollover schedule, the school has hosted delegations from more than 50 schools. Teachers teach six classes per term and have a block of prep time every day. Students can take eight, rather than seven, classes. Seniors now have stiffer graduation requirements.

The biggest benefit has been students' attitudes about school. Student referrals and fights are at an all-time low, grades are edging up, and community-placement opportunities have expanded. The first year, many teachers had to figure out how to do some things differently. By the second year, they could see a real difference in their teaching styles (Jan Donnelly, telephone interview, March 1996).

Imbler High School

Imbler High School is one of the few schools that has tried block scheduling (1992-93) and dropped it. This 200-student school restructured fourth and fifth periods, the periods before and after lunch. One day they had fourth period before and after lunch, the next day fifth. At the end of the year, some teachers liked it and some didn't. Now they are back on a traditional schedule.

La Grande High School

This school went to the block in 1992. Teachers teach three classes and have a full 88 minutes of prep. Wednesdays are Flex Days. First and third Wednesdays are Teacher Access Days. Teachers are available to talk with or help students from 7:30 to 9 a.m. During this time, attendance is optional.

Second and fourth Wednesdays are Faculty Forum Days. Teachers spend from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. working on curriculum or other changes. Discipline problems have subsided, GPA has improved, and expectations have increased (Roland Bevell, telephone interview, February 1996).

Madison High School

This large Portland school is in its fourth year on combination schedule. Monday, Thursday, and Friday are seven-period days. On Tuesdays, periods 2, 4, and 6 meet for 86-minutes each. Students are free to go at 1:23 p.m., but teachers are available in their classrooms until 2:49 p.m. The other four periods meet Wednesdays.

The superintendent encouraged schools to innovate. Resistance came from teachers leary of student behavior if class time was extended. Difficulties and concerns have centered on teachers trying to do two of their regular classes in the extended period. Most quickly learned to include two or three activities (Ron Hudson, Internet and fax interview, February 1996).

Woodburn High School

Woodburn chose a straight four-period block. Most courses are 18 weeks. The school also offers a number of nine-week classes, many available only once a year. This creates tremendous schedul-

ing conflicts, according to assistant principal Betty Komp.

More than half the students are migrant Hispanics or Russians who leave in April for the summer fishing season in Alaska. This schedule allows them to complete more credits than in the past.

CONCLUSION

Increasing the flexibility of the secondary school schedule is clearly an idea whose time has come. But building the momentum to change is a major obstacle. Ideally teachers will form the core of the group propelling the change, and all stakeholders will participate in the change process. Superintendents and school boards can be supportive by providing release time for decision-making and staff development.

One clear benefit of extending teaching blocks is a more relaxed school atmosphere. Related gains include improved teacher/student rapport, decreased dropout rates, absenteeism, and discipline problems. Ongoing evaluations and adjustments are essential to ensure that schedules are serving, not impeding, the learning process.

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years they've been here. Some of the most experienced teachers have been extremely receptive to many of the changes. Many have told me they wished they would have changed their teaching styles and methodology years ago. Those teachers who are very creative have adapted more easily. Those with the most success use three or four strategies per class."

As with any change, there are some kinks that need to be worked out. One of the biggest, according to Peacock, is the study center, a room supervised by staff members who are on prep. Classs sizes range from twenty to thirty-five. Each teacher supervises for half a 90-minute period per week.

"It's a disaster," said Peacock of the study center. "There's no credit, so many of the kids don't see any value in it. They want to either socialize or skip." Students skip first and fifth periods, the periods that begin the day, the most. Next year will likely see changes in this setup.

Another set of problems centers on music classes, particularly those requiring instruments. "Kids' lips pucker on them when they have to play for 90 minutes," said Peacock.

Peacock's advice:

> First and foremost, you'd better have your staff involved from day one and make the decision as a group. You are taking people so far out of their comfort zone to try something new that they've got to buy it.
>
> Second, don't lose sight of the need for staff development, particularly in the areas of cooperative learning and learning styles. Staff development should be an ongoing process.
>
> Third, even if you have a total buy-in, making a change is not easy. The best of staff will struggle in the beginning. Do not try to assess your program too soon. Don't scrap it after the end of the first semester. The first nine weeks, staff members were running around like chickens with their heads cut off. Kids were having lots of time to do homework because it filled the time, but as the semester progressed, that diminished.

"We're going to do it another year, I feel confident," Peacock concluded.

Bend High School

Bend High School took its own sweet time moving into block scheduling. The staff began discussing the possibilities in September 1991, but it wasn't until the 1995-96 school year that they moved into a full block.

Peter Miller has headed this 78-teacher, 1,420-student school for seven years. "When Mountain View High School [three miles away, in the same district] went to a block schedule," said Miller, "we were watching them very closely. At that time it was called Copernican scheduling. Very few high

schools were doing it. Mountain View was a pioneer."

A school-improvement grant from the state provided the financial help needed to begin exploring options for change. Discussion went on for two years, with staff studying a variety of schedules. They started with large-group discussion, then formed ad hoc committees by department. Staff members visited schools, attended conferences, and reported back to the larger body.

Rather than plunge fully into a radical change, the school decided to wet its toes on what they called "an interim block schedule," starting in January 1993. For the next year and a half, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays were traditional seven-period days, with 49-minute classes. On Wednesdays, periods 1, 2, 5, and 7 met in 90-minute blocks. Periods 2, 4, and 6 met on Thursdays, then students were dismissed at 1 p.m., allowing teachers 90 minutes for staff development. Teachers from Mountain View High School came over to share what they were doing, both with the whole staff and in curriculum-area groups.

Early decisions were made by consensus. But in February 1994, as the site council and ad hoc committees discussed plans for the 1995-96 school year, the site council decided that 66 percent agreement would be the criterion for settling on a new schedule. In the course of two meetings, proponents presented six possible schedules. Members of the site council voted first for their top two choices, then voted again to choose between the two. Eighty-eight percent opted for the current schedule.

Students have four 85-minute classes each day (A, B, C, and D) and a 20-minute tutorial period, tucked between block B and the 45-minute lunch. Teachers are required to stay in designated classrooms during tutorial, so students who have questions or want extra help know where to find their teachers. Some students take early-bird classes, which meet 6:30-7:25 a.m. daily.

Blocks A and C are rotator classes, meeting every other day. Blocks B and D are quarter classes. The dozen or so rotator classes include band, performing arts, and social studies. Quarter classes, which compress a semester's work into a quarter, change every nine weeks. This allows students to graduate early or retake classes they've had trouble with.

To complicate things further, many students shuttle back and forth between Bend and Mountain View High Schools. They can take applied arts, wood shop, and auto shop at Mountain View, while print shop, video production, and advanced-placement biology are offered at Bend.

"It's working very well for students and staff," said Miller. "We have less movement around the school and it's slowed down the pace a bit. The percent of complaints is probably less than a tenth of one percent. The biggest complaints have come from the performing-arts teachers."

Before starting, the staff convened nine parent forums during a two-week period—three night, three morning, and three afternoon sessions. Staff from Mountain View spoke at the first three sessions. Students were informed through student forums. One student from each second-period class attended a forum, then took the information back to share with classmates. Anyone with additional questions could call "the warm line." The superintendent was supportive and the board was kept informed.

Before the 1995-96 school year started, teachers attended trainings to help them vary teaching methods and practices they'd used for years. Every teacher now has a 90-minute prep period. Teachers are encouraged to talk to each other during preps, to integrate curriculums, and to sometimes work in teams.

"Teachers are talking more and teaming more," says Miller. "Traditional teachers are having to change their methodology. Students are learning more. They can master concepts now. I think that's so much more valuable than just seeing how much we can push through the curriculum. And with nine-week chunks, if a student blows a class, he can retake it almost immediately. The remediation turnaround is greater."

Costs and FTE haven't changed.

Miller's advice:

> Get out there and see what's being done, then adapt it to your needs. Don't just adopt someone else's schedule. Use a lot of process. Talk to your school community about what you're thinking. And once you start, give it a three-to-five year commitment. It's going to take a lot of tweaking before it's right.

Cottage Grove High School

Four years ago, Cottage Grove High School started a partial block schedule, and this year the staff has experimented with another form. Both experiments continue to evolve. Ed Otten heads this 780-student, 43-teacher school, located at the southern end of the Willamette Valley.

The staff started discussing changes in spring 1992, recalled Otten, when the school was selected as a Century 21 development site by the state. Counselors, instructors, and administrators worked together to decide exactly what form the changes would take. During February and March 1992, twelve staff representatives met at a church for two days. They focused on integration and on meeting CIM requirements.

"They cussed and discussed it," quipped Otten, as they examined research and looked at what other schools were doing. Then the twelve-member group wrote up their findings and delivered a midterm report to the staff. They proposed a two-year CIM program for grades 9 and 10. Out of

that came the three-period block. Staff members who weren't on the committee had opportunities for input before the site council made its final decisions.

It started with ninth- and tenth-graders taking their language arts, social studies, and science in a 3-period block that met daily. Other classes stayed the same. Three teachers share 75 to 85 students for three periods. Monday through Thursday students rotate among the teachers, one-third taking science, one-third taking language arts, and one-third taking social studies. Each teacher generally deals with each group every day, but sometimes the team groups the kids together.

"If I was a visitor, I would think they didn't have a block schedule," said Otten.

Fridays are what they call MAP days. Each student is assigned to a Mentor Advisory Group where they work on integrated projects such as career exploration or talent show production. Students meet with the same teacher for three periods every Friday for two years, which helps promote deeper student-teacher relationships and a feeling of belonging.

Science dropped out of the tenth-grade block this year, leaving a two-period block for language arts and social studies, and block scheduling spread to the rest of the grades. On Wednesdays, students have three 85- to 90-minute blocks (1, 2, and 3) and are released early. School gets out at 1:30 p.m. instead of 3:15 p.m. On Thursdays they have four blocks, periods 4-7. Teachers use the early-release time for collaborative planning, inservice training, or meetings with individual students.

Physical-education teachers and teachers of hands-on activity classes such as home economics really like it, Otten said. And for classes that have a community component, the longer time block allows them to go to a hospital, for example, to see what's going on there.

One concern for teachers is that some students find it hard to concentrate and get restless about two-thirds of the way through the class period.

Otten's advice: "Visit schools that are doing it. See what other schools are doing, then decide what's going to work best for you."

Elgin High School

"One 90-minute lecture is twice as boring as two 45-minute lectures," observed an anonymous student at Elgin High School, a 160-student school in the northeastern corner of the state.

This school looked at block scheduling as a means of holding on to a broad curriculum in the face of budget cuts. In 1993-94, Elgin started with a modified block, and in 1994-95 expanded on that. Ed Schumaker, in his fifth year as superintendent for the Elgin School District, said the staff and board

began talking about scheduling changes four years ago.

"The board was interested in providing students with more opportunities to take fine arts classes, band, and chorus," said Schumaker. "Under a seven-period schedule, it was impossible to ensure that every student could be in both band and chorus. We had a strong program before, but it had dwindled. We wanted to rebuild it."

Budget cuts were part of the impetus. Four years ago, the school had a teaching staff of thirteen to fourteen FTE. Now it's been reduced to nine to ten.

Faculty and administrators spent somewhere between twenty and thirty hours on Friday afternoons discussing what was best for the students. No parents or students were involved, but the school board helped them identify goals and set prirorities.

In 1993-94, language arts, social studies, and some vocational classes went to 90-minute blocks. Some of them, such as language arts and social studies, met on alternate days. But the majority of the day was still traditional. In 1994-95, the rest of the classes switched over. Two 90-minute blocks start the morning, followed by three 45-minute blocks (lunch is one of them), and ending with a 90-minute block. Students earn a full year's credit in one semester of a block class.

"The block schedule allowed us to continue providing opportunities for kids that we couldn't have otherwise," said Schumaker. "It increased the breadth and depth of learning, and cut way down on lost time. All our vocational classes have substantial startup and cleanup time. Wood shop. Metal shop. Art class."

The short blocks in the middle of the day allow students to take more electives, Schumaker noted. Four blocks a day would be too limiting. Students went from being able to complete seven credits a year to eight (or nine, if they take early-bird math or weight training, which run from 7:30 to 8:15 a.m., before the rest of the classes start). In fact, in the past two years, some seniors who had already completed most of the credits they needed to graduate were leaving school early—or not cooperating in class.

"We decided not to fight that battle any more," said Schumaker. "We notified parents that if the student didn't have any intention of cooperating in class, they didn't need to come. That caused some problems for the community. People thought kids should be in school all day."

Last year the number of students not in class peaked. This year it has gone the other way. In the fall, about 19 students had less than a full schedule. At the same time, 13 students were taking more than eight classes per day, more than they could have before. They do this by taking classes by satellite or at Eastern Oregon State College.

Other benefits include a marked reduction in absenteeism and disci-

because the year moves faster for them. They have to put more emphasis on staying on top of their work. Students have more time to work in their vocational classes, and in language classes they can do two or three activities on the same topic in one day. Teachers can incorporate more discussion and thought into their classes. Band, chorus, ensemble, and physics are in the 45-minute slots, so students who want to can take two of these courses.

Math teachers are still struggling, he said, because none of the text materials are written for longer time blocks. And the foreign-language teacher doesn't believe it's best for the students.

"Every schedule helps one subject and hurts another," Schumaker noted.

The comment at the beginning of this piece was made on a student evaluation form. Most of the comments were much more positive. The biggest criticism from the community concerns students who aren't in class. In response, the school is raising its standards for graduation, requiring seniors to take a certain number of advanced classes to earn a diploma. And the level of mastery has also increased. Schumaker expects some students may have to drop or repeat classes to continue to be successful.

"What we're going to say is, 'What you did was OK, but you need to improve even more.' All work should be seen the way writing is done—rough draft, correct, rewrite," stated Schumaker.

His advice to other educators: "The most important thing for them to know is that if by going to block scheduling you increase the number of opportunities students have [enabling them to complete requirements more quickly], you have to be prepared to deal with the community. "

Another thing to look at is preparation time. Teachers could go from having 50 minutes of preparation time to 90 minutes, resulting in decreased opportunities for students. The teachers at Elgin agreed to continue with the same amount of preparation time as before. Some now have one block period during one semester and none the next.

Also, he added, teachers need to change their teaching styles. Ninety-minute lectures just aren't appropriate.

Hood River Valley High School

Hood River Valley High School has become Oregon's block scheduling mecca. Now in its fourth year on the block schedule, the school has hosted delegations from more than 50 schools, sent packets of information to at least that many more, and given many presentations as well.

Jan Donnelly, in her sixth year as principal of this 950-student, 56-teacher school, spent much of her first year listening. She discovered that

changes in the past had been top-down, starting with the superintendent. As a result, the staff and community didn't have much buy-in.

Toward the end of her first year, 1990-91, she invited interested staff to begin meeting with her, talking about changes. The following fall, she asked for volunteers for a research team. This nine-member team, composed of teachers, administrators, classified staff, and the superintendent, visited Kuna, Idaho, and other sites. Kuna was on an alternate day A-B schedule.

"When we talked about the full-semester block as a team," said Donnelly, "we felt that in our community it would be too tough to sell it."

She called 22 schools in Idaho and Colorado. Most told her that whatever is best for your community is the best choice. The board left decisions up to the staff. Donnelly kept them informed and answered questions regularly. After presenting findings to the staff, she asked for volunteers for various planning teams: logistics, needs assessments, dialoging with students and community, and matching plans with the mandates of the Oregon school reform act.

Committees reported back right before spring break. All recommended going on an alternating-day, A/B schedule. A staff vote revealed that 84 percent thought it feasible to begin in the fall. A state grant gave them the funds to send several teams of teachers to observe schools on the block schedule.

"Without exception, teachers came back and said, 'We can do it!'"

As soon as school was out, two teachers from Idaho and two from Colorado came to give an inservice—for the entire staff in the morning, and for department areas in the afternoon. Teachers were offered small stipends to plan during the summer, working in teams.

"Just that bit of motivation and appreciation of planning time was so appreciated by them," said Donnelly. "We only had money to pay for 20 hours, but I've never seen so many teachers in and out of here all summer."

At the start of the 1992-93 school year, the whole staff took a cooperative-learning class together. This resulted in an explosion of collaborative teaching and group projects, Donnelly noted.

"The first day of classes teachers were amazed at how much less stressful it was," said Donnelly. "It's made a phenomenal difference for our students and our teachers, too. They're seeing three groups a day instead of six, and they have a block of prep time every day. They're still teaching six classes per term, but students can now take eight, rather than seven."

One challenge was defending the longer prep time. Donnelly says it takes more time and creativity to plan for the longer blocks.

Another problem arose from a tripling of the number of students requesting early graduation. Now students wanting to graduate early must complete an early-graduation process and meet set criteria. This process

includes teacher recommendations, application, 2.75 GPA, and parent and student interview. In addition, beginning with the class of 1999, students must have 26 credits to graduate.

Students Like the New Schedule

The biggest benefit has been the students' attitudes toward school. They feel much more positive about the schedule and about the opportunities provided to them. Surveyed in April 1994, 88 percent said they preferred the new schedule to the old. Grades are edging up by small increments. Community-placement opportunities have expanded. For instance, this year 70 students are cadet teachers, helping out at the elementary and middle schools, and 28 are in internships at hospitals, automotive shops, attorneys' offices, and veterinarians.

To create the 8th period of time from 7 periods, the program started out with each freshman and sophomore being required to take a study hall. That created problems, according to Donnelly.

"Kids who don't have very good study skills don't do well in big groups. They didn't have much success with it," she said.

Freshmen are now required to take a class called Explore, which includes study skills, driver's education, and a survey of six career pathways. Sophomores take SEARCH, which focuses on helping them discover careers well suited to their talents and interests. This special class includes "job-shadowing" and visits to local businesses and organizations of interest to them. They also learn Red Cross first aid and complete CPR training. More staff were hired to develop and teach these curriculums.

Body development and jazz band meet every day, during an early-bird slot. The music instructor runs sectionals during the lunch hour and makes sure to schedule concerts on the day of his classes. Donnelly said the music instructor wishes they could figure out a better schdule for music classes. But when faculty were asked who would like to return to the old schedule, not a hand was raised. The first year, many teachers had to figure out how to do some things differently. By the second year, they could see a real difference in their teaching styles and so could students.

"We've seen a dramatic decline in students referrals, and fights are at an all-time low," said Donnelly. "Teachers now have and take the time to deal with student problems in the class instead of sending them to the office. Students all say they like it better than the old schedule."

Teachers Must Improve

When Donnelly presented the proposed changes in community forums, the biggest question was: "If my child is bored in 45 minutes, how in the

world do you think you're going to keep his interest for 90 minutes?" The answer to that one was teachers use a wide array of teaching techniques, vary activities each period, and plan with great care. One young male teacher said: "There are really three kinds of teachers: great teachers are going to love this; teachers who just barely get by are going to become better; and teachers who are poor teachers now had better find a new profession."

Donnelly's advice:

> My firm belief is that it takes all the stakeholders to make it happen. When schools visit, I always recommend that they bring groups: parents, students, board members, teachers, somebody from the district office.
>
> It's not something that you do alone. For teachers to make this change, they need an impetus to do it and it needs to be real. We gave lots of inservices for other schools. With the exception of one, they were warm and exciting. The one event that was cold and unfriendly had been forced in a top-down fashion by the superintendent.
>
> Another piece is to be sure and communicate a lot about this. We did it in newspaper articles, radio shows, forums, newsletters, and in classrooms.
>
> Gather the information about obstacles before you start and if you see one, try to be open about it and solve it before proceeding.

Imbler High School

Imbler High School is one of the few schools that has tried block scheduling and dropped it. This 200-student, 12.5-teacher school in northeastern Oregon serves grades 7-12. Gus Forster is principal.

"We didn't go to a full block schedule," he said. "We restructured our fourth and fifth periods, the periods before and after lunch. On alternating days, we had fourth period before and after lunch. The next day we'd have fifth period before and after lunch."

Before trying it, Forster says the staff looked at ideas for about three months and talked with other schools on various kinds of block schedules.

"Collectively we decided to look at it and then to implement it," he said. "We agreed to do it for a full year. We wanted more time with kids in some of the classes, especially lab, biology, shop, art, and journalism, but we weren't too impressed with a 90-minute timeframe."

They tried it in 1992-93, without any special training. At the end of the year, said Forster, the teachers had a meeting and talked about it. Some liked it and some didn't.

"So we went back to the old way," he said. "The longer time periods

didn't seem to be much of a problem. The main problem was that teachers didn't like seeing the kids every other day. That's kind of a neat concern to deal with. We did see improvement in the classes we felt would benefit most by it. Kids completed their labs in biology in a more timely fashion. The amount of instruction time in those settings really increased. If I had just those classes that benefitted from it, I'd still be doing it."

"There weren't many complaints about going back," said Forster. "I think if we were going to try anything different again, we would go to a full block, but it's very hard for a small school."

His advice:

> They'd have to ask, Is this in the best interest of the students? If the answer is yes, I'd go ahead and do it. If you are doing it for the teachers, I'd ask why? If it's so they can improve their teaching, that might be a good reason. If it's so they can have longer preps, and it's primarily for their convenience, I'd question that.

International High School

International High School in Eugene is in a class by itself. For one thing, it's been using a block schedule since its inception in 1984. For another, IHS is a school within a school. Students spend half a day in IHS classes, and half in classes offered by the host school, either Sheldon High School or South Eugene High School. Enrollment is voluntary. Students in IHS choose to be there with full knowledge of the curriculum and schedule. Caron Cooper heads the 22-member teaching staff of this 1,200-student school.

"At the time it was conceived," she explained, "the founders were looking at the research and theory on effective high school instruction. It was calling for longer blocks of time, moving away from the factory model, integrating subject matter, teams of teachers working together with the same kids, block scheduling, a product-oriented education culminating in a senior project, and a site council."

When the policy board and governing board (made up of parents, students, faculty, and administration) set up the school, they incorporated those concepts into the school's operating scheme. Originally students took two 90-minute blocks each day. Now they take two 80-minute blocks at one school, and two 75-minute blocks at the other.

"We did that because our times have to link up to the host school's times," noted Cooper. "As the other two schools have changed their schedules, it has required us to tinker with our time."

IHS offers both a morning and an afternoon block at each site. Each

IHS offers both a morning and an afternoon block at each site. Each group of students travels together so teachers can make a decision to do something a little bit different that day and have the whole time.

Each of the four grade levels has a required four-course curriculum covering the history, literature, geography, and culture of a specified area, the Americas, for instance, or Africa and Asia. In four years they study all the continents. Language arts and social studies are interwoven throughout the curriculum. Students have an alternating-day schedule. They take two classes on alpha day and the other two on omega day. Students are required to take a foreign language from the host school, along with other basics such as math and sciences.

"When our students graduate, they talk about how much they gained from International High School," remarked Cooper.

For Cooper and her staff, the biggest frustrations have come from having to interface their schedules with those of their host schools.

La Grande High School

"Students were tired," said Roland Bevel, principal of La Grande High School. "It felt like a rat race."

But that's how it had always been. A Twenty-First Century grant from the state provided the impetus for change. To gain clarity, the staff of this 850-student school came up with a vision statement and a goal:

> *Vision statement:* To create a more humane and productive relationship among students, teachers, and community members through creative and flexible use of time, curriculum, and facilities.
>
> *Goal:* To empower our students to become successful adults.

Grant money was used for substitute and travel time. Interested staff visited schools in Utah and Washington. They also gathered information from Colorado. The school board and superintendent were supportive but left the research and decision-making up to the building staff.

"We found that nothing we saw really quite fit our needs," said Bevel, "so we ended up creating our own model. We worked purely by consensus in developing the model, so in the end the teachers had a buy-in. Our community was kind of apathetic about the whole thing. There was very little interest and not much opposition."

Following a year of planning, they settled, in fall 1992, on four 88-minute blocks, a 60-minute lunch, and 10-minute passing times. After a first-year evaluation, lunch dropped to 58 minutes and passing to 8. Students take four classes. Teachers teach three blocks and have a full 88 minutes of prep.

A class that used to take a year now takes a semester. Half-credit classes that used to take a semester now last nine weeks.

Wednesdays are called Flex Days. First and third Wednesdays are Teacher Access Days. Teachers are available to talk with or help students from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. In the first year, students were required to come. Now it's optional. They can sleep in if they want to. A survey this year showed between 31 percent and 55 percent of the students are taking advantage of this opportunity. Classes last 66 minutes.

"It's so beneficial," said Bevel. "Kids can come in and make up tests or labs in an unpressured atmosphere."

Second and fourth Wednesdays are Faculty Forum Days. Teachers spend from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. working on curriculum or other changes, usually in large or small groups, many of them cross-curricular. Classes are 56-minutes long. Only bussed-in students are on campus before classes begin. They go to the commons or the computer lab, which hasn't been a problem.

Alternating-Day Classes

Before starting the new schedule, one of the biggest concerns was how it would affect the music and agriculture programs. Those teachers said they needed to see students for a full year. Alternating-day classes were the solution. Students who take acapella choir, jazz band, and so forth meet every other day. That is equivalent to being enrolled on a daily basis for a semester.

"That caused a lot of problems," said Bevel. "We didn't have enough classes to put in all the slots, so it created some open periods. We worked through that. Staff realized they needed to help out to make it work."

Now AP history, personal finance, freshman PE, yearbook, desktop publishing, and marketing classes fit into those alternate-day slots with agriculture and music. Foreign language and math teachers are still not completely satisfied, but Bevel said he doesn't think any of his teachers would prefer going back to a seven-period day, and some have told him they would leave if it came to that. Many say the degree of learning is enhanced because they can start something and finish it, can teach a principle and have a lab, or have a test and correct it together. Few teachers have to reteach what they taught the day before because there's now time to both teach and reinforce concepts.

"Teachers had to purge their curriculum," said Bevel. "They couldn't do the same things they had always done."

Staff members had previous training in cooperative learning. They shared ideas and strategies in faculty forums.

"We had no special time or money for training so we did it ourselves,"

said Bevel. "We were told changes needed to be budget-neutral."

A Relaxed Atmosphere

Discipline problems have subsided. In the first year, there were only two fights, he noted. Before that, a fight a week was the norm.

"Our vision has certainly been fulfilled," said Bevel. "It's so much more humane. When people come to visit, they remark on how relaxed the kids are, how relaxed the atmosphere is. Our GPA has improved and our expectations have increased. We're very, very pleased. I don't see us making any major changes in the future."

His advice:

> Spend some time planning it. You've got to have the support of your board and superintendent. I would encourage people to do it because somehow you've got to provide teachers with the time they need to do what they need to do.

Madison High School

This 1,300-student Portland school led by Principal Ron Hudson is in its fourth year on a schedule that combines traditional and block scheduling.

Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays are seven-period days; Tuesdays and Wednesdays are block days. On Tuesdays, periods 2, 4, and 6 meet for 86 minutes each. Students are free to go at 1:23 p.m., but teachers stay in their classrooms until 2:49 p.m. to work with students who come in. Periods 1, 3, 5, and 7 meet on Wednesdays. Hudson said the change to this schedule was part of the school's reform efforts to meet the requirements of the Educational Act for the Twenty-First Century.

"We wanted some interdisciplinary classes and extended time to do labs and projects. This was a compromise to allow that, yet the change was not radical enough to jeopardize the preparation of those who remained more traditional. Our committee provided the impetus based on their investigation of the school reform law and best practices around the nation."

The superintendent's role was that of encouraging schools to innovate, said Hudson. Resistance came from teachers who were wary of what student behavior would be like if class time was extended.

"It forced people to confront the need to change, at least for these extended periods," said Hudson.

Before beginning the new schedule, the change committee designed and delivered two inservice meetings focused on teaching in extended periods and interdisciplinary teaching.

"Difficulties and concerns have centered on teachers trying to do two

of their regular classes in the extended period. It simply didn't work. People usually realized that different activities had to be used in these extended periods," said Hudson.

He noted several benefits: field trips without missing other classes; speakers without interruption; knowing students better; being able to complete labs without interruption, thereby cutting down on multiple set-up-take-down; and the opportunity during student/teacher time to make up work or get additional help.

As for problems, Hudson said some teachers still try to do two regular lesson plans in one extended period. Other teachers wish for extended periods every day. Students don't make the best use of student/teacher time. Many choose to leave early, creating problems in the community. And occasionally there's confusion over which schedule they will follow, especially when there's a Monday holiday or a snow/ice cancellation.

His advice:

> Do it! It really does create some exciting opportunities for students and teachers. It will neither be universally pleasing nor will all teachers make maximum effective use of it to begin with, but change will occur.

Mountain View High School

Mountain View High School got off to a rocky start in its initial venture into block scheduling. Not only did the school have a skeptical board, but after a 20-person committee spent two years coming up with the perfect plan, it was nixed by the food-service staff. Now it's become one of the states' block scheduling pioneers.

Dottie Bertelli, assistant principal in charge of curriculum and scheduling, is the only administrator still on staff who was there through the planning and startup. Mountain View is a 1,500-student, 75-teacher school in the Bend-LaPine School District. The school first instituted a block schedule in 1992.

Changing the structure of the school day was the focus of the approximately twenty-person committee made up of teachers, parents, and administrators. They visited Wasson, Colorado, and reported back. A team from Wasson also visited Mountain View. A state grant provided funding assistance. The committee sought a great deal of parent input, meeting with them in small and large groups. Similar meetings took place with students.

In June 1992, the board approved a schedule that had four blocks and a common lunch. When the food-service staff said they couldn't serve that many at once, planners decided to split blocks two and three.

"You could have a 90-minute class, then a 45-minute class and 45 minutes of lunch," recalled Bertelli. "We ran two lunches back to back. It was a real good system for kids to work. For 90 minutes, kids were free on campus. If they didn't want to be in class, they could easily blend in with others."

The only benefit was that the 45-minute classes allowed programs that want to meet all year, such as band, choir, and publication classes, to meet every day. This schedule, which lasted a year and a half, also included a 30-minute focus time between first and second blocks every day. Students were assigned to a specific classroom but allowed to sign out and get help from other subject-area teachers. Often, students signed out but didn't get to the next place.

"It had a lot of glitches and was very difficult to monitor," said Bertelli.

Halfway through the second year, with a new principal and vice-principal on board, they changed the schedule. Now it's a four-block schedule with a one-hour lunch and two 15-minute passing times. (Many students shuttle back and forth between Mountain View and Bend High School.) The first 20 minutes of lunch are tutorial time. Students can be free or visit teachers. Teachers can require students to come in during that time and give detentions if they don't show.

Rotating Classes

Two of the blocks have the option of meeting every day for 18 weeks to earn one credit, or taking two classes that meet every other day, for two half-credits. Rotating classes include choir, band, ROTC, newspaper, yearbook, health, PE, personal finance, personal keyboarding, drama, speech, photography, journalism, and creative writing. In the other two blocks, there are no rotating classes. This year, A and C blocks are the rotators, whereas previously they were blocks 2 and 3.

"This is the first year with the 1st and 3rd," said Bertelli. "It has caused a lot fewer problems already. We're going to stay with this schedule for at least two years."

Bertelli tries not to give teachers more than one set of rotators. Also, she said, this schedule helped her manage with existing staff when the student population grew by 250 students this year.

Restructuring goals included increasing academic achievement, reducing fragmentation, creating more flexibility, reducing absenteeism and the dropout rate, and better meeting the abilities of all learners. Absenteeism has dropped from 9.2 percent to 5 percent, while the dropout rate has gone from 7.8 percent to 3 percent.

"It really has done it for us," said Bertelli. "Of course there are always kinks. The biggest thing is there are still some staff members we need to work with on appropriate use of time, but that is true regardless of the schedule."

The math department was very unhappy in the beginning. Administrators met with staff members in the department, asking what they needed to make it work. They came up with a plan. They integrated Algebra II with personal finance and made it a year-long block, integrated physical science and algebra, and made pre-calculus a year-long block. Calculus is now AP calculus.

"The math department is happy now," said Bertelli. "Students and parents are happy, and our SAT scores have gone up the past couple years. Foreign language was concerned about retention but it hasn't been a problem. The things kids can do if they focus on something are really exciting."

Students can graduate earlier now. By the end of their junior year, a number of students find themselves just one credit shy of the required twenty-five credits. But out of 290 seniors this year, only 31 chose to graduate early. Those who stay on can pick up as many as 32 credits, including a number of advanced-placement college credits.

Scrutiny by the Board

Bertelli said the board was initially skeptical of the change. Within the first semester, the board ordered an outside evaluation and the next year they requested Bertelli to do another complete evaluation. Now all three high schools in the district are on the same schedule.

"We were scrutinized, put under a microscope. It was awful," she said. "But it banded us closer together. We believed in it. And there weren't a lot of other schools in Oregon doing it. What if we failed? The superintendent really went to bat for us and had a big hand in writing the final proposal. As more and more schools went to the block and we had accumulated solid data, it became easier to convince them."

Now Bertelli is in the position of being a pioneer, going to other schools to talk about how her school did it and how it's working. She's even been flown to Florida to talk to a school there.

"It's very rewarding seeing the difference in the stress level of the staff and students, and the mastery of learning that's going on. The campus is calm. The entire atmosphere of the school is different. It seems to have met the needs of a lot of different factions. "

Her advice:

> You need to look at all the options and evaluate what you are trying to do. If you're trying to eliminate stress, decrease dropouts, increase

attendance rate, and maintain a comprehensive high school program, it's great. And you can't make such a major structural change without getting the staff ready.

The biggest advice: Do your staff development. The only staff development we had initially was a visit to Wasson. We had an older staff. These are "old dogs" that need to learn new tricks. It was an unrealistic expectation for them to suddenly have these kids twice as long and be expected to change everything.

Ontario High School

Ontario High School got a new principal out of its explorations of the block schedule. In early 1994, two groups went to visit the high school in Kuna, Idaho, where Jay Hummel had been principal for its four years on block scheduling. By September 1994, when Ontario went on the block, Hummel had become Ontario's principal.

Marian Young, now assistant principal at Ontario Middle School, formerly taught at Ontario High, a 770-student, 40-teacher school. She was heavily involved during the research and implementation process.

"I was on the leadership team we had then. It was a precursor to the site council. We had been looking at staff development and school improvement and we'd read information and heard about block scheduling. A Twenty-First Century grant provided funding to research restructuring time and implementing changes. We discovered there weren't a lot of studies out there."

They divided the staff into teams and sent them to visit sites that were using block scheduling. Almost every staff member including classified employees went on a visitation, and each team included at least one parent, a school board member, and a couple students. They went to La Grande, Mountain View, Hood River, and Kuna, Idaho. Information from the visits went into a notebook. Summaries were presented at meetings.

Young said that the initial research group thought a compressed schedule, four classes per term, would be most advantageous. But they found it was too drastic a change to sell to the staff. Band, agriculture, and biology staff members had concerns around seasonal issues. Math teachers had concerns about retention of information if students had gaps as long as eight months between consecutive courses. The teaching staff first voted on whether the school should make a change or not. Approximately 87 percent voted yes, so a committee was formed to plan scheduling options. It met daily. Discussion started in October 1993. Visitation began January 1994 and the final decision was reached in April 1994. Ninety-five percent of the staff voted for an A/B rollover.

"The superintendent at the time was pretty low key with regard to this process," said Young. "He was a strong backer of site-based management. We sent copies of all reports to him. As long as we did a good job of doing our homework, we had his support."

Young believes the committee could have involved parents and students in the process to a greater extent. "We did well on the visitations," she said, "but perhaps we should have had a public meeting."

Teachers Require a Prep Period

A few teachers never became convinced that they should make a change, but by the end of the first year only one teacher felt it hadn't been a good idea. Another concern for teachers was that they wanted a guarantee of having a prep period every day. In some schools they had visited, when the schedule changed from a seven-period to a four-period day, teachers only got a prep period every other day. Teachers here said this issue was nonnegotiable.

"Our class size went up, something like from 17 to 20," said Young. "If every teacher gets a prep every day, in a four-period day you only have three-fourths of the teachers teaching. Any school looking at going to a block schedule needs to consider whether they can afford to do that. They might need more books or desks for larger classes."

Last year the schedule included a Wednesday tutorial an hour before school started, with teachers guaranteed to be in their rooms. Attendance was poor, so this year tutorial time is twenty-five minutes every day and attendance has been better. School starts at 8:30 a.m. Teachers have to arrive at 7:30, be available to students at 8:00, and start teaching about 8:30.

Teachers believe the quality of learning has improved, and everyone comments on the calmer atmosphere in the building. Office personnel find fewer students running in needing things. Initially teachers were worried that if they were having trouble with a student, the extended periods would be intolerable. But they found that they generally could work out behavior problems better than they had in the past.

One teacher noted, "The first couple weeks I kept looking at my watch, wondering 'When will this class ever be over?' But once I made the adjustment, it began to feel normal."

Part of the Twenty-First Century grant was used to give teachers additional teaching strategies for teaching in the block. Gail Elkins, a private educational consultant from Tigard, provided the trainings. Nearly all the teachers had one or the other and many had both. Much of the training took place during the summer. A stipend helped teachers feel better about giving up their time, and the plan saved money because no substitutes were necessary.

In surveys taken during the first year, the main concern that kept surfacing was confusion about remembering what day it was, which schedule was being used on a particular day.

Increased Requirements for Graduation

Principal Jay Hummel said another major problem was that students only needed 22 credits to graduate, and under the new system they could earn 32. To remedy this, students now need 25 credits to graduate, and included in that is a year of foreign language, a year of computer literacy, and a half-year of community service. Eighty juniors and seniors are earning dual credit—college and high school credit at the same time for specified classes.

Another problem is students who take too many classes. Hummel said they can now drop one without a penalty.

"The kids who do service learning get a lot of good out of helping," said Hummel. "They start to realize that they can help each other. It does wonders for their self-esteem." Some possibilities are Eagle Scout projects, drug and alcohol prevention program, peer tutoring in the elementary school, and leadership class.

Young's advice:

> Focus in on what your goals are. What do you want to accomplish? Sometimes I think schools go through changes just because everyone else is doing it. If it's fewer students per teacher, you don't want to go with an eight-period rollover. Moving to a compressed schedule, though, could decrease the number of students per teacher.
>
> Make sure that the way you choose to change really helps you accomplish your goals. A lot of staff involvement is important in the process. Even if you do that, some members will feel like it was a done deal before you ever started.
>
> Also, try to provide teachers with training to expand their teaching modes. If they've been a teacher who lectured the entire period, they'll need some other tricks in their bags.

Hummel's advice:

> It must be a bottom-up approach. You have to get a groundswell of interest with your teaching staff to make it work. If it's top-down, I've watched those fall apart in a year or two. The teachers kill it from the inside out. All they have to do is tell the kids that it sucks and they'll go home and tell their parents.

South Eugene High School

Block scheduing created more problems than it solved at South Eu-

gene High School. This is the school's second, and last, year of block scheduling. For now, anyway. Chuck Vaughn and Lynn George are coprincipals of this 1,800-student, 74-teacher school and of the International High School, which shares the building. IHS students take half their classes in the IHS system, half in the SEHS system.

In the 1993-94 school year, according to Vaughn, the site council asked the scheduling committee to explore different schedules. This standing committee is composed of representatives from each department (including classified staff) plus students and parents. In the spring of that year, the committee proposed a schedule that was then adopted by the site council. They decided to go with an eight-period day, each class 45-minutes long. These could be taught as singletons, or doubled to create longer blocks. They revised the IHS schedule to make the end of their morning block coincide with the end of SEHS's third period.

The superintendent and school board weren't very involved in this process, according to Vaughn.

"They let schools make these kinds of decisions for themselves. The superintendent's main concern is always that we process everything through our stakeholders' group and don't ram things down people's throats. If we do that, they'll support us."

Vaughn said teachers were given the choice of teaching block or singleton classes About 50 percent of the classes went to block. Two departments, English and social studies, all chose the longer periods. No math or PE classes wanted it. All other departments had a mix.

"In a normal week Monday schedule," Vaughn said, "there are no block classes. Every class is 45 minutes long. Tuesdays and Thursdays, even periods meet in blocks. Wednesdays and Fridays, the odd numbers meet in blocks. We complicate our lives by sometimes moving a Monday to a Friday. So basically we have a Monday schedule and an odd/even schedule. We move those around a bit. It's difficult, but we try to build a month's schedule and stick to it. Sometimes ice and snow closures mess that up. It's a scheduling nightmare."

Most students take six classes. It's possible for some to have fourth and sixth period open. This means that two days a week some students have nothing scheduled for periods 3, 4, 5, and 6. Some use that time wisely and get projects done, but others don't. That has been a concern of parents.

The benefits, he said, have been mostly instructional. The longer time periods allow for different kinds of learning activities and more creative and innovative teaching that holds the interest of the students better.

> Teachers whose subjects fit naturally into blocks like them very much. Those departments where it doesn't seem to help are not too crazy about them. Students didn't like the blocks much at first, but now

> they're saying don't get rid of them. Parents like them, but there's great concern about the unscheduled blocks, especially at the freshman and sophomore levels. There's a difference of opinion between parents and students about that unscheduled time.

Shortly before spring break this year, the administration decided on a new system after the site council was unable to reach consensus. The students had come up with one proposal; teachers had come up with another. Vaughn said there were many other proposals as well, but those two came closest to reaching consensus. To break the stalemate, the administrators put their heads together and came up with a hybrid that eliminates extended blocks but gives each of the stakeholder groups some of what they wanted.

It's an eight-period day with a common lunch between fourth and fifth period. Teachers will teach five classes and supervise a study hall for one period. Any student can drop into that study hall. What teachers most wanted, according to Vaughn, was to teach fewer than six periods and to have adequate prep time. What parents most wanted was supervised study halls. Students' top priority was a common lunch.

> We paid attention to all the stakeholders. They all got something and they all had to give up something they wanted. Parents wanted smaller class sizes. They didn't get that. With blocking we wouldn't have enough classrooms to offer all those study halls. Not having the blocks also solved a huge problem around unassigned time. The kids aren't crazy about it. The parents aren't crazy about it, and neither are some of the teachers. One has filed a grievance.

Vaughn's advice: "In a school like ours, where 350 kids in the morning and 350 kids in the afternoon can't take regular classes, don't do a mixture. Either do all blocks or do all singletons."

Tillamook High School

Block scheduling became a common topic of conversation among staff members during the 1993-94 school year, according to Principal Rick Knode, as the staff discussed the need to develop programs that would meet the requirements of the Certificate of Initial Mastery and Certificate of Advanced Mastery.

"The whole staff started discussing it at that time," he said, "so we had some people come down from Hood River and talk to us. We made a proposal to the school board to let us close school for a day, and sent staff out to visit various schools on block schedules."

They visited schools in Crater, Seaside, Hood River, Clatskanie, and Portland. Some were on modified blocks, some on A/B block, and some on a semester block. Each group came back with a report on the pros and cons.

Students and parents didn't go on the visits but were invited to listen to the reports. Three or four days of discussion followed. At that time, the staff had two hours of release time every Wednesday morning. By the end of the 1993-94 school year, the faculty reached consensus to go with a modified block schedule, starting in 1994-95.

"We started with a seven-period day," said Knode. "In order to try it, teachers agreed to not have a prep period for that first year. They were willing to do that. At the end of the first semester, 100 percent of the teachers voted to continue."

This year the school switched to an eight-period day. Teachers teach six periods and have one period of prep and one supervising period each day. Mondays are late start days. Teachers have a couple hours before school starts at 9:35 a.m. to work on restructuring, curriculum changes, portfolios, and the like. The rest of the week, school starts at 8:05 a.m. All eight classes meet for 33-minute sessions. Tuesdays and Fridays all eight classes meet for 43 minutes each. Wednesdays, the odd-numbered classes meet in 91-minute blocks. Thursdays the even-numbered classes do the same.

The eight-period day allows students to enroll in more elective courses and gives staff an opportunity to work individually with smaller groups. It also allows students to complete graduation requirements in three years. Some people view this as a problem, but Knode thinks that if the impetus behind restructuring is to get kids into jobs, this could be seen as beneficial. Also, next year the school is implementing a program enabling students to earn community-college credit by taking AP classes during their junior and senior years.

One of the drawbacks is the short periods on Mondays. Some teachers feel the contact time isn't long enough to be effective, but for others it works out well.

Teachers of activity and vocational classes strongly support the longer periods, said Knode. Teachers of art and science classes like it. Classes that are struggling are those that prefer everyday contact with students: physical education, foreign language, chorus, band. Two math teachers like it, two don't.

"On block days, things go a lot smoother," said Knode. "The atmosphere is quieter. It's just amazing. Teachers are less likely to be as understanding with kids on the block days. They are less tolerant of misbehavior. People in the office see the same ones more often on the block days."

The superintendent and school board supported the changes by giving staff the time to work them through.

Knode's advice:

> I think it's important that all of your staff have an opportunity to view block scheduling and be involved in the decisions. And once you

make a decision, set up opportunities for reassessment to see if you are really doing what you want to do.

Woodburn High School

Woodburn's schedule-change process got a jump start when a new principal was hired for the 1992-93 school year. Jack Bimrose came over from Hood River High School, where they were beginning their first year on block scheduling. Betty Komp, who was a teacher at the time, is now assistant principal.

"When the principal started talking to staff members about what was going on at Hood River, they got interested very quickly," Komp recalled.

An ad hoc committee formed, made up of interested teachers, several site-council members, and the media specialist. They started meeting in November. Members visited Hood River High School and a school in Washington, and made reports to the site council. Membership in the two committees overlapped to some degree. At that point the site council took the lead. Staff from various content areas at three- or four-block scheduling schools were invited to come visit during a full day of inservice meetings in January.

Before spring break, the ad hoc committee presented proposals to the full staff. They assembled a packet of information so people could digest the material and scheduled a vote in early April. After considerable debate about what percentage of staff needed to vote yes for approval, the site council, administrators, and ad hoc committee settled on 80 percent. When the vote was taken, 89 percent voted to change.

"Then the real work began," said Komp. "We went to a straight four-period block, every day the same. A one-credit class is eighteen weeks long. In mid-January, we start a new school year. This creates tremendous scheduling conflicts, much worse than normal. "

Komp said the school also offers a number of nine-week classes, and many are currently offered only once a year. Students have to choose among calculus, choir, biology, chemistry, and so forth.

But the staff had some very good reasons for choosing this schedule, said Komp. The high mobility factor of their student population was a major factor.

> About 55 percent of our students are Hispanic and migrant. And we have a Russian community that leaves at the end of April to go fishing in Alaska. They were always missing the last nine weeks. With this schedule, students could be here for nine or eighteen weeks and earn credit. If we didn't have a migrant population, I don't think many of our teachers would have gone for this.
>
> Band, choir, and AP calculus are extremely difficult. We have some

phenomenal teachers who do extra with their kids before school to keep them on line, get them ready for competitions. The math teacher was running Saturday intersessions to get calculus students ready for competitions.

Band meets before and after school as needed. These teachers are shared with another building, so when they're doing more at Woodburn, they do less at the other school. Choir meets at lunch, particularly when they're getting ready for a concert or competition.

"The biggest drawback is math," said Komp. "We tried having math at a variety of times to keep the quality we've had. We have an exceptional math department."

Still, there's concern that the 90-minute block doesn't meet the needs of math students. Math teachers contend that students need constant guided practice. If they don't get that, they're not as apt to do well in state assessments.

As a solution, the school is in the process of enlarging the building. Once the remodeling is complete, the staff is looking at going to some 45-minute blocks that run all year long. It's not possible with the number of classrooms now available. Graduation requirements have increased incrementally from 23 to 26 credits. All students take the full four periods, but some seniors go off campus for regularly scheduled work experiences. Between ten and fifteen students graduated in January, and the staff is surprised the number wasn't higher. Before block scheduling, fewer than a handful opted for early graduation each January.

Before going on the block schedule, the staff had three spring and summer inservice trainings.

As for benefits, Komp said the school is calmer now and students are taking their education more seriously. Discipline problems have diminished, and teachers are handling most behavioral problems themselves. Discipline referrals are about half what they used to be. Teachers have a full 90-minute prep. Forty-five minutes are allocated for staff development and 45 are for prep. Teachers seem more willing to use some of that time to deal with students.

Komp's advice:

> Be thorough with your investigation and research. It helps to have a core group of teachers who are invested from the very beginning. When you build your schedule, the focus should be on what's best for your school. The key is to look at your students and your own school culture. That has to be the foundational block or it won't work.
>
> And it takes time. It doesn't happen in two months. I would encourage any school to look at it for a full year.

Conclusion

Increasing the flexibility of the secondary-school schedule is clearly an idea whose time has come. But building the momentum to change is a major obstacle. Reports of successes from other schools can serve as an impetus. Another way to spark change is by assessing the needs of your school, finding out what changes various stakeholders would like to see.

Ideally, teachers will form the core of the group propelling the change. Modifications in the length of class time affect teachers' lives more than any of the other stakeholder groups because, to be successful, teachers must relearn how to teach. The tremendous time and energy required are difficult to muster unless teachers share a clear vision of what they are trying to achieve.

Support from the superintendent and school board is essential. Release time for restructuring and staff development is the most common method of showing this support, but some superintendents also take leadership roles, setting up forums to encourage discourse and the free flow of information. Students, parents, and community members will feel much more invested in the change process if they are involved and feel their needs are taken into account.

One clear benefit of extending teaching blocks is a more relaxed school atmosphere. Most students like school better than they did before. Related advantages include improved teacher-student relationships, decreased dropout rates, decreased absenteeism, and a dramatic drop in discipline problems.

Most teachers adapt well, incorporating a variety of creative strategies into their class time. They are able to spend more time with students and have a greater opportunity to individualize instruction than in the traditional schedule.

Students are often able to repeat classes more quickly, and many students accelerate their progress, graduating early or spending their senior year in advanced-placement classes or internships. Academic achievement is generally equal to, if not better than, that found with traditional schedules.

Long blocks of time work well for hands-on classes, such as home economics, shop classes, art, and the like. English and social-studies teachers also usually appreciate having more time. But many music, math, and foreign-language teachers do not believe the longer schedule is well suited to their students' needs. Some schools have split one or two blocks to alleviate these problems.

Ongoing evaluation is essential. Just because a school has spent the last seventy years on one schedule doesn't mean it needs to do that with a new one.

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