

Advantages of Block Scheduling

Much effort has gone into the study of block scheduling and its extensive impact on student learning. Researchers have conducted interviews with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and educators. They have administered surveys, both to collect data on individuals' perceptions, and to uncover the hard facts about block scheduling. As part of the inquiry process, researchers in the field have collected stories of real experiences; these help illustrate the change process that occurs as schools move toward block scheduling. There are both pros and cons to block scheduling according to the findings of these researchers. Some of the major advantages researchers have noted are the following:

- **IMPROVED TEACHING AND LEARNING**

With longer blocks, teachers have more time to complete lesson plans and to examine and re-evaluate practices. More class time is available to develop key concepts, incorporate creativity into instruction, and try a variety of classroom activities that address different learning styles. Longer time blocks allow for in-depth study, such as individual student projects, peer collaboration, and one-on-one work between teachers and students (O'Neil, 1995; Eineder & Bishop, 1997).

- **ABILITY TO FOCUS ATTENTION**

The "less is more" philosophy espouses that students better understand and retain material when they have an opportunity to apply information to various contexts rather than merely cramming the facts (Rettig & Canady, 1996). With block scheduling, students and teachers are able to focus on fewer subjects, and to explore them in greater depth. Both teachers and students assert that this exploration allows them to become engrossed in the subject matter rather than moving rapidly through material. With a standard 4x4 block program, teachers have only three to four classes to teach in a given semester, greatly reducing the number of students with whom they meet regularly.

- **FRAGMENTATION REDUCED**

With block scheduling, instructional time is not fragmented by frequent transitions between classes. Fewer distinct classes means less time spent on classroom management activities, such as calling attendance and organizing and focusing the class. In addition, there are fewer opportunities for students to arrive late to class (Rettig & Canady, 1996).

- **INDIVIDUALIZED PACING**

The 4x4 schedule allows advanced students to move through material at a more rapid rate, and they are able to finish sequential language classes, such as Spanish

I and II, within one academic year. Some schools allow students to use this to their advantage and graduate early. The 4x4 schedule also provides the opportunity for failing students to retake a class without falling behind their grade level (Woronowicz, 1996).

- **MORE COURSE OFFERINGS**

Students actually take more courses in a standard 4x4 plan because they enroll in at least eight classes per year instead of six or seven (Rettig & Canady, 1996).

- **STRONGER INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

The number of daily classes for which students and teachers must adjust and prepare is decreased, allowing students to develop the deeper interpersonal relationships that are integral to academic success (Rettig & Canady, 1996; Eineder & Bishop, 1997). Teachers get to know students more personally which enables them to adapt lessons to the interests of their students. This extensive personal interaction between teacher and student, frequently touted as the highest motivation for student learning, is strengthened through block scheduling (Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, 1995).

- **TEACHER COLLABORATION**

Collaboration between teachers is possible because block scheduling gives them longer time periods in which they can exchange ideas and strategies, hold meetings with each other, and work on staff development (Rettig & Canady, 1996).

- **ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS INCREASE**

The results show that students' grades improve overall. There are fewer failed classes, a higher number of students on the honor roll, an increase in students' grade point averages, and fewer failing marks. Statistics reveal that fewer at-risk students drop out of a school with block scheduling. With a 4x4 model, students can have a fresh start at midyear or reenter school at the beginning of the second semester (O'Neil, 1995; Eineder & Bishop, 1997).

- **ATTITUDES AND COMPREHENSION IMPROVE**

Surveys indicate that teachers' and students' attitudes about their school improve. Students state that they get more done in class and learn more because they are better able to focus their attention on their studies. Teachers appreciate the inclusion of projects and activities that facilitate both learning and interpersonal communication. Classes address material in more depth, and teachers feel students are better able to comprehend and retain concepts learned in a block period (O'Neil, 1995; Eineder & Bishop, 1997).

- **STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES MAINTAINED**

Though data are limited, statistics available indicate that block scheduling does not negatively affect standardized test scores. (Rettig & Canady, 1996; Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, 1995).

- **PACE OF SCHOOL RELAXES**

Longer passing periods between classes can slow down the pace of a school by providing the chance for students to get books from the library, use the restroom, and talk with their friends (O'Neil, 1995).

- **IMPROVEMENT IN DISCIPLINE**

Most schools which introduce block schedules find that discipline problems on campus decrease, possibly because students are more challenged in class and are better known by their teachers. Decreasing the number of passing periods reduces opportunities for disruption. In addition, teachers of block classes feel more capable of handling behavior problems because they have adequate time to address these issues in class and have a stronger rapport with their students (O'Neil, 1995; Eineder & Bishop, 1997).

- **ADDITIONAL FUNDING UNNECESSARY**

Generally, block scheduling can be used in a school without spending any new money. However, block scheduling should be accompanied by staff development if its benefits are to be fully realized (Rettig & Canady, 1996).

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