

## Advantages and Disadvantages of the Block Schedule

### Advantages to Teachers

The benefits of block scheduling for teachers can be broken down into two categories: organization of the school day and delivery of instruction. In addition, block scheduling yields special benefits for foreign language instruction.

#### Organization of the school day

- The 4x4 schedule presents a more manageable schedule (Edwards, 1993).
- Teachers have fewer preparations and more planning time. They teach three classes of 90 minutes and plan for one 90 minute period, therefore, 25% of their time can be devoted to planning.
- The average class size drops from 29.8 to 24.5 students according to the *Report on Block Scheduling in North Carolina*, 1994. However, the report cautions that "...elective courses may actually increase in average class size."
- Teachers have fewer students within a semester, consequently they have fewer papers to grade in a 4x4 schedule.
- There seems to be an improvement in discipline and dropout rate seems to decrease.
- The number of class changes is reduced, therefore limiting the possibilities for discipline problems since most disruptions occur during that time of transition.
- Schedules for itinerant teachers can be modified to limit travel time. On a 4x4 plan a teacher can be assigned to one school each semester; on an A/B schedule, teachers can be assigned to one school one day and to another school the following day.
- Less time is devoted to administrative duties (roll-taking, absence slips, etc).

### Delivery of Instruction

- Teachers have fewer students, thus they have the time to know their students better, to focus on their needs and learning styles, and to advise them as needed.
- There is more time for quality instructional time because there is less wasted class time.
- There is more class time to conduct extended activities such as seminars and projects.
- The reduced teacher workload frees time for improving the delivery of instruction and may include team teaching, interdisciplinary studies, and cooperative teaching strategies.

### Advantages to Students

The same two categories of advantages can be applied to students enrolled in a school with block scheduling.

### Organization of the school day

- Students can take four courses per semester for a total of eight courses per year instead of six, therefore earning more credits toward graduation.
- Students have twice as many opportunities to complete the required courses if they fail a subject.
- Students have a limited number of class changes, therefore the likelihood for disruption and disorderly conduct in the halls is lessened. Time used for class changes is incorporated within the instructional time.

### Delivery of Instruction

- Students have fewer tests, quizzes and homework assignments since their study load has dropped from six to four classes daily.
- Students might be able to complete one year of post secondary study in addition to their high school program (through AP or courses taken on a college campus, for example).

- Students benefit from a multitude of instructional strategies used to address the variety of ways in which they learn.
- There is more time for the development of meaningful rapport between students and teachers.
- Students benefit from a less fragmented curriculum.

Special Advantages for Foreign Languages

While block scheduling offers a variety of benefits for all teachers and students, there are some advantages which are especially promising for foreign languages.

- There are more opportunities to offer and take advanced courses (see figure 3 below). In Wake County, a Fuquay-Varina teacher reports that her enrollment has increased dramatically in the upper levels of Spanish.

	180 Day Courses	90 Day Courses
9th Grade	FL Course 1 (2Semesters)	FL Course 1 (1st Sem.) FL Course 2 (2nd Sem.)
10th Grade	FL Course 2 (2Semesters)	FL Course 3 (1st Sem.) FL Course 4 (2nd Sem.)
11th Grade	FL Course 3 (2Semesters)	FL Course 5 (1st Sem.) FL Course 6 (2nd Sem.)
12th Grade	FL Course 4 (2Semesters)	FL Course 7 (1st Sem.) FL Course 8 (2nd Sem.)

Figure 3: Opportunities for extended studies in one language

- Students have an increased number of possibilities for selecting electives. Under the block scheduling there are 32 different slots (8 per yr x 4) for course work as opposed to 24 (6 per yr. x 4) under a traditional schedule.
- Students have more time and energy to internalize the language.

Disadvantages to Teachers

Teaching and learning on a block schedule present many challenges to teachers and students alike. The following have been mentioned by teachers in North Carolina:

- Less total class time (30 hrs. less) because 180 days of a traditional 55-minute period amount to 165 hours while 90 days of a 90-minute period total 135 hours. Therefore, there is less time to "cover" the book.

- Longer time needed to plan for classes.
- More difficult to place transfer students.
- Harder to make up absences.
- Problematic scheduling of AP courses since AP exams are given in the Spring.
- More classes to plan for over the course of one year (five in a traditional schedule vs. six in a block schedule).
- In an alternate day setting, teachers still have to teach 150 students every other day, and still have the same amount of paperwork to correct and have the same amount of administrative paperwork to handle every other day.

Disadvantages to Students

Students can also be adversely affected by block scheduling; they report the following:

- They have more extensive homework to complete daily in each discipline even though the number of homework assignments has dropped from six to four.
- They find it harder to make up absences.
- In an alternate day setting, they still have to prepare for six classes every other day, and still have the same number of tests, quizzes, etc.
- They may become bored easily if the teaching methods are too teacher focused.
- Some students have a more difficult time keeping up with the faster pace that is inherent to block scheduling.

Concerns for Foreign Languages

There are several areas of concern which specifically affect block scheduling and foreign language education. These concerns need to be taken in consideration when planning a quality program. They are listed as follows:

- Sequencing for foreign language courses. It is especially important when planning the schedule to ensure that courses are offered sequentially so that

students have the option to continue the study of the language without long time lapses. It is equally important for students to realize that extended interruptions will impact onto their level of language proficiency.

- Availability of courses. Students pursuing more advanced levels of language study are frequently enrolled in advanced courses in other disciplines. For this reason, it is essential to guarantee that singleton courses in the upper levels are scheduled in order to avoid potential conflict. In addition, students who delay their study of the foreign language until the last two semesters of their senior year, must have the courses available to meet their college requirements.
- Development of language proficiency. Foreign language teachers have been the most vocal group in their opposition to block scheduling. They are greatly concerned about the possible impact of the block schedule onto the development of language proficiency. Foreign language educators believe that language development occurs during a long, uninterrupted sequence of language study. At this time, there is no data, other than anecdotal, to support the positive or negative effects of block scheduling on language development.

