

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE CONTRASTING THE
ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BLOCK SCHEDULING

by

Brian Scott Chance

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Investigation Advisor

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The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI. 54751

ABSTRACT

	Chance	Brian	S.
(writer)	(Last Name)	(First Name)	(Initial)

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(Title)

Disadvantages of Block Scheduling

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Block scheduling was introduced into public education several years ago. There are different variations of this scheduling, but it primarily consists of four ninety-minute class periods. This is opposed to the traditional forty-five minute classes. Block scheduling was designed to increase teacher/student interaction and increase the number of classes offered per year as compared to a typical

seven period day. Teachers were also expected to become more creative in their instructional approach as a result of the increased class time. The implementation of block scheduling was designed to allow students with more opportunities for mastery through questioning and answering during classroom instruction. Many of the districts that provide block scheduling have also experienced increased attendance. This is believed to be a result of the amount of information presented in a given class and the increased interaction between students and teachers.

Opponents of block scheduling feel that it reduces the amount of curriculum content and creates an atmosphere where students are bored with instruction. Teaching under block scheduling may be difficult for teachers who are unable or unwilling to change their method of delivery. Also, certain disciplines perceive the implementation differently. Classes, which provide laboratory opportunities, appear to receive the greatest benefit from it. Lecture based classes seem to bore the students, as they are unable to remain interested for ninety minutes of instruction. The activities that block scheduling hoped to provide are the reason that opponent's feel that content

suffers from its implementation. The activities reinforce the learning, but take away from further instruction.

The method of implementation determines the success or failure of block scheduling. Schools that have been successful with the implementation have involved the primary stakeholders in the process, provided staff development time for teaching strategies related to block scheduling, and have constantly evaluated the implementation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Scheduling concerns have become a major issue for school systems and school administrators. They must balance the required contact minutes with staffing and budget issues. More recently, student needs have played a role in scheduling issues.

Block scheduling is one of the newest scheduling models to be introduced into public schools. Block scheduling consists of four ninety-minute class periods per school day that run for one quarter. This is opposed to a typical schedule, which consists of seven forty-five minute classes that last a semester. Versions of this type of scheduling actually began in the early 1970's. At this time, it was referred to as modular scheduling. The implementation of modular scheduling has proven to be an educational trend that has basically disappeared. In the mid 1990's, this type of scheduling reappeared under the new name of block scheduling.

Administrators implemented block scheduling as an effort to increase the interaction between students and

teachers. It is a well-known fact that student needs have changed dramatically over recent years. Educators now believe that additional contact time allows for more one-on-one time between teachers and students. Leaders in the education field also expected that additional contact time would allow for more question and answer time to increase the opportunity for students to master content.

Additionally, the extra time that block scheduling provided would allow for activities to reinforce the lesson. These activities were also viewed as tremendous opportunities for student mastery. It was also anticipated that these activities would increase comprehension due to the reduced amount of classes taken at one time. Students could focus on four subjects rather than seven. Block scheduling also intended to better prepare teachers for classroom instruction and to make their instructional approach more creative.

Under block scheduling, teachers are given a ninety-minute planning period per day opposed to a forty-five minute planning period under a traditional schedule. Concerns over the attention span of students were an issue with the implementation of block scheduling. Teachers would have to use a variety of instructional activities if they were to keep the attention of students. The increased

planning time was designed to allow teachers with the resources to accomplish this. Activities, which involve a teacher demonstration significantly increases the student's comprehension level (Lenning, 1980). It was believed that this increased interaction would help to retain students within an educational setting. The Lenning study pointed out that students who had a stronger relationship at school would be less apt to drop out of high school. The aforementioned attributes are beneficial to students and enhance the overall comprehension of lesson material.

The amount of credits available per year was also a reason many schools implemented block scheduling. Block scheduling allows a student to receive eight credits per school year opposed to seven credits under traditional scheduling. However, it does not typically allow for student study periods during a school day. The study halls were eliminated with the understanding that a portion of homework could be completed during class. This would allow students to clarify any misunderstandings before they left class.

This study will examine the advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling through the following issues.

1. Teacher/student perspectives
2. Staffing/budget concerns
3. Implementation

Since the implementation of block scheduling, it has become an issue of debate within the realm of education. Many educators feel that it is beneficial to schools and others feel that it simply does not work. Proponents of block scheduling feel that it increases teacher/student interaction, attendance, and graduation rates. The reason for their feeling is justified by the identified intentions of block scheduling.

Opponents of block scheduling feel that it greatly reduces the amount of content delivered in a class period. The reinforcement activities and the time allowed for homework reduces the amount of time that they can provide instruction. Certain content areas or lecture-based classes also feel that the nature of their class does not work under the principles of block scheduling. Classes

that do not allow laboratory experiences find it difficult to maintain student attention during a class period.

The implementation of block scheduling determines its success or failure. A transition, which requires students and teachers to be in the same classroom for one and a half hours, requires some thought and planning. Teacher training time is vital to the success of such a transition. The researcher hopes to find effective training models and strategies in which teachers are trained to make block scheduling effective.

Budget and staffing concerns are always issues within an educational institution. The implementation of block scheduling requires additional money for staff and staff development. Under block scheduling, students receive one additional credit per school year. Additional FTE's (full time employments) is inevitable under block scheduling. A school with an enrollment of eight hundred students would likely experience an increase of five new staff members. Also, the training of staff members will require additional staff development money to make the implementation successful. This may be possible under current staff development money, but may take away from training for

other district goals. This study hopes to determine the advantages from increased staffing and possible alternatives to offset the increased spending.

Statement of the Problem

Block scheduling is a highly debated topic within the realm of public education that warrants an in depth study into this topic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study will be to explore the advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling through a review of literature and research concerning teacher and student perspectives, implementation, and staffing/budget concerns.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

School districts across the United States began using block scheduling over thirty years ago and have been using variations of it ever since (Smith, 1999). However, the recent versions of block scheduling appear to have become very popular in the mid 1990's. It was implemented, in part, to increase the interaction of students and teachers. This review of literature will examine both positive and negative perspectives related to block scheduling. It will describe what the literature identifies to be strengths and weakness of block scheduling. The literature review will also examine school districts, which have been successful and unsuccessful with their attempts to implement block scheduling. Staffing and budget concerns related to the implementation of block scheduling will also be addressed in the literature review.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Block Scheduling

For teachers, one of the most beneficial aspects of block scheduling has been the increased planning time that has been allotted to them through block scheduling. Under

block scheduling, teacher prep time has increased from one forty-five minute block to one ninety-minute block of time. The lengthened class period requires teachers to be more creative in their instructional approach to retain the attention of their students. Most teachers believe that the increased planning time has allowed them to be more creative and effective in the classroom (Wilson & Stokes, 1999). Students and teachers, in the study conducted by Wilson and Stokes, were better able to participate in activities, discussions, and critical thinking questions which allowed for a greater comprehension by the students. The success of block scheduling depends greatly upon the delivery of materials, and teachers appear to be benefiting from the increased planning time to make their delivery more creative (Skrobarek, 1999). In a study conducted by Slate & Jones, 31% of high school students found that classes were more productive under block scheduling. Students also believed that they were more actively involved in their learning (Slate & Jones, 1999). Nearly 50% of these same students reported that their teachers were using multiple teaching strategies in the classroom and felt that it enhanced their learning.

Block scheduling also allows teachers to provide students with immediate feedback on course progress. Teachers are able to assign activities for students to do and monitor their accomplishment during the same class period. In a recent study (Benton-Kupper, 1999), evidence was found that teachers felt that students benefited more by being able to receive instant feedback rather than feedback the following day. The study also found that teachers felt that in-depth discussions and critical-thinking questions allowed for greater comprehension by the students. Forty two percent of students reported that they were more able to pass classes based on the frequent feedback and assessment offered in block scheduling (Slate & Jones, 1999).

A qualitative study of teacher perceptions (Benton-Kupper, 1999) indicated advantages that teachers experience which result from block scheduling. The teachers that participated in this study stated that they felt block scheduling provided increased opportunities for additional instructional strategies. Under traditional scheduling, students who were in the middle of discussing key information would have to continue their discussion the following day. Under block scheduling, they are allowed to

continue their discussion which allows for more continuity within the classroom. The teachers also reported increasing the amount of classroom activities under block scheduling. They indicated that these activities allowed more in-depth learning. These activities reduced the restlessness of students and provided them with cooperative learning and critical thinking opportunities.

A recent study revealed that students are more actively engaged under block scheduling (Slate & Jones, 2000). Students are allowed to be introduced to a topic, explore the topic, and reflect upon this topic all within the same class period. This type of active or advanced learning affects the educational outcome by providing students with a connection to the outside world and showing respect for students by sharing discussions with them (Bush, 1998). Also, teachers who are using a broad range of instructional strategies have been able to interact more personally with their individual learners. Students also feel that they are more actively involved in their learning. The study conducted by Slate & Jones also found that 53% of students reported increases in cooperative learning, laboratory, investigative, and collaborative opportunities since the implementation of block scheduling.

A study conducted by Irmsher (1996) found several advantages of block scheduling that are difficult to accomplish under traditional scheduling. Irmsher indicates that larger blocks of time create more productive and flexible classes. This is a result of the varied and interactive teaching methods that are recommended under block scheduling. The study also revealed that block scheduling made better use of school time by reducing the amount of administrative duties required in a day. These administrative duties include attendance taking, introductions, and closures. Block scheduling also reduces the number of students that a teachers has contact with during a school day. This allows teachers to become better acquainted with their students and reduces discipline problems. The article also noted that individualized instruction and meaningful interaction between teachers and students is next to impossible under traditional scheduling, while block scheduling was designed to allow this.

Additional research finds that the academic benefits are surfacing with the schools, which offer this type of scheduling (Delany, 1997). The Wilkes County school system

in the state of Georgia implemented block scheduling in an attempt to increase achievement scores on standardized tests. Within two years of implementation, this district saw a substantial increase in their Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Reading scores improved from 36 in 1995 to 53 in 1997 and math scores rose from 48 to 71 during the same period. The teachers within this district believe that the gains are attributed to the possibilities offered under block scheduling. The teachers are able to teach and re-teach and reinforce basic principles within a class period and do this with direct interaction with the students. It was also noted that block scheduling provided more opportunities for enrichment opportunities through laboratory and hands-on learning opportunities. The Wilkes County School System also reported a fifty percent reduction in special education referrals within the past two years. The teachers within this district have stated that block scheduling has allowed them to individually assess student learning and provide appropriate instruction. They indicated that they feel this is responsible for the increased test scores and the decrease in discipline referrals (Delany, 1997).

Other schools are experiencing the same success with block scheduling. Many schools that report success with block scheduling state that the change takes time. In West Virginia, a five-year study of block scheduling effects on ACT scores reported little changes for the first few years. After that, it showed significant increases in the ACT scores (Cooper, 1996).

Block scheduling has also been believed to improve school climate. The research has found that block scheduling has made a positive impact on school climate (Buckman, King & Ryan, 1995). The extended time that students spend with a given teacher allows them to become more personal with them. This has created a learning environment that is less stressful, quieter, and more relaxed (Smith & McNelis, 1995). Improved relationships between students and teachers were also achieved under the model of block scheduling. Teachers have fewer students each day and spend more time with them. As a result, research shows that the communication between them has increased (Eineder & Bishop, 1997). The increase in communications may be a result of the increase in non-traditional teaching strategies typical under block scheduling.

The Los Angeles Times (Gorman, 2000) has reported the success of block scheduling, through the perspective of local administrators. The study focused on high schools operating under block scheduling within Ventura County in California. Local administrators indicated that block scheduling gained popularity as a result of the statewide graduation tests. They found that block scheduling gives their instructors more time to teach the core subjects, to reach struggling students, and to meet state academic standards. They also agree that block scheduling allows them to get their students up to grade level faster than traditional scheduling.

Block scheduling has also reduced the discipline problems within these schools. The administrators attribute this reduction to the reduced amount of passing periods in a day. The discipline problems that typically happen during this time have been cut in half as a result. A study reviewing doctoral dissertations found that principals in California indicate that block scheduling reduces discipline problems (Brandenburg, 1996). A similar study reported that schools with block scheduling received sixty percent fewer discipline reports and their out of

school suspensions decreases as well (Hackman, 1995). Hackman, also reported an increase in attendance rates for schools after they switched to block scheduling. The same study indicated that schools showed a two percent increase in the first year of block scheduling. Other studies conducted on attendance rates under block scheduling support Hackman's findings (Carrol, 1994) (Buckman, 1995).

Increased instructional time has also increased in the researcher's school district as a result of block scheduling. The principals believe that this is a result of decreased attendance taking and paper collecting that typically takes place at the beginning of a class period.

In Missouri, a study of administrator perceptions of block scheduling also found it to be effective in their schools (Stader & Despain, 1999). These administrators believe that student achievement has increased since the implementation of block scheduling. They based their beliefs on data related to improvement of student work, depth of subject matter covered, student retention of material, and increased enrollment in advanced classes. The teachers under these administrators also viewed block scheduling as successful.

Despite the advantage of increased planning time, the allocation of funds still drives many public schools in America. The implementation of block scheduling has cost every district an additional forty-five minutes of instruction, which results in more full time employment positions. In most states, teacher contracts and legislation requires that teachers receive a minimum amount of planning time, which is generally equivalent to about one class period or forty-five minutes. However, some states are passing new laws which require planning time per week. For example, Texas, has recently passed a law requiring teachers to receive 270 minutes of planning time per week (Smith, 1999). This has allowed the districts in Texas to give teachers three days with a ninety minute planning period and two days without any. This appears to be very difficult for teachers who do not have a planning period during these two days (Smith, 1999). Many districts in Texas are taking advantage of this new law purely for the financial benefit. Smith feels that this may be the downfall of block scheduling, as teachers will no longer be able to prepare more creatively and become less successful with block scheduling.

Opponents of block scheduling often argue that students simply cannot sit still for ninety minutes of class time. It would appear that students would have difficulty sitting still for ninety minutes of lecture based content, but as previously stated teachers are forced to become more creative in their instructional approach under block scheduling. The length of the class period appears to have little impact on the attention of students and more on the learning strategies involved. A study conducted by Retting and Canady (1996), found that attention was increased by the use of a variety of learning strategies, and limited strategies reduced the attention of students regardless of the amount of time involved (Bryant, 2000). Teachers are more likely to be successful as facilitators rather than directors of learning under the structure of block scheduling. Student perception regarding attention span differs greatly from the opinions of teachers and professionals.

A study conducted by the Los Angeles Times (Gorman, 2000), found that students reported increases in time off task towards the latter parts of the class period. Many students also felt that they could not stay focused for the entire class period and that their brain was "turning to

mush". The New York Times conducted a similar study (Nassbaum, 1999) and observed many students chatting, fidgeting, and doodling on their notebooks. The teachers in this district indicated that this was not a problem under traditional scheduling.

The ultimate evaluation of block scheduling is the success that student's are experiencing. This appears to have mixed results. Some sources indicate that block scheduling has had a very positive impact on the public school system (Slate & Jones, 2000), while others do not find any significant difference or a difference for the worse (Thomas & O'Connell, 1997). A recent high school case study (McCoy, 1998) revealed that students and teachers felt more empowered under block scheduling and overall schoolwork had improved since the implementation of block scheduling. It also appears that some content areas are experiencing greater success with block scheduling than other content areas (Diabiase & Queen, 1999). Social studies and vocational courses seem to be experiencing the greatest success. This is most likely due to the nature of the study. These content areas have a greater ability to provide students with more hands on activities, which stimulates their students. Other content areas, which have

less possibility for hands on activities are experiencing trouble keeping students focused (Adams, 1997).

Opponents of block scheduling also argue that the increased planning time or the outcomes of block scheduling are not related to block scheduling, but effective teaching. Teachers who are effective under block scheduling will probably be effective under traditional scheduling. They also argue that many teachers do not provide the activities to make block scheduling effective. Another recent study (Knight & De Leon, 1999) indicated a concern about the amount of content that students were receiving under the block scheduling system. It stated that students were actually learning less as a result of the lengthened class period.

Russell Smith, consultant for the Texas Department of Education, examined the increased planning time (Smith, 1999). He observed the planning time wasted by teachers. Smith found that many teachers were using the same lesson plans that were used under the traditional scheduling system and were not changing anything. He also found that many teachers were simply assigning more homework to the students and allowing them to complete it

during class time. Essentially, they were teaching the same content per day and assigning a lot of homework. Smith also indicated that he observed many teachers increasing their discipline referrals to have students removed from their classes.

Other research supports the ineffectiveness of block scheduling. The state of New York conducted a study (Thomas & O'Connell, 1997), on the perceptions of students toward block scheduling. These students stated that there was little increase in class discussions or projects under block scheduling. These students also contradicted Smith's finding in the previous study by stating that discipline referrals were reduced and classroom climate was more comfortable under block scheduling. The students also stated that they were more likely to attend school (increasing school attendance) because of the amount of information covered each day. This also increased the amount of stress that the students had. They were afraid that staying home when they could not attend school would result in failure or struggle when they returned.

Teachers have also noted concerns over the sequencing of courses under block scheduling. Many students take

courses that expand from one to another in a back-to-back sequence. Block scheduling has been criticized because it does not always allow for classes that build directly from the previous one be taken immediately after it.

Mathematics and foreign language classes seem to benefit the most from sequencing. For example, if there is a significant lapse in time between German I and German II, students may have difficulty retaining the information that they learned in German I, making German II, more difficult. This can be avoided by careful planning during the scheduling process, but this has been neglected in many schools (Shortt and Thayer, 1998).

Administrators have also been criticized for failing to monitor teachers under block scheduling and failing to provide adequate training for them to be successful under the new model of instruction (Queen, 2000). Many teachers are continuing the lecture-based instruction, failing to utilize the additional time for reinforcement activities.

Implementation

The review of literature indicates that there are many advantages of block scheduling. It also finds that districts have had some difficulty with its implementation.

The future of block scheduling appears to lie in the transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. Effective implementation of educational programs is a key element into the success of those programs (Wilson & Stokes, 1999). Many schools experienced difficulties during the first year of using block scheduling. In fact, many veteran teachers felt dissatisfied with block scheduling because they felt like first year teachers again (Hackmann, 1998). This initial dissatisfaction has given many teachers a negative attitude towards block scheduling.

The initial step in implementing block scheduling should include discussions among stakeholders in the process. The research (Reid, 1996) suggests that administrators seek input from parents, teachers, and students prior to implementing block scheduling. Reid indicates that without support, implementation is at best difficult if not impossible. Developing a proposal which represents on-site data supporting block scheduling will help gain stakeholder support. Reid also states that faculty support and keeping them informed of changes made throughout the implementation process is extremely important.

The research has found planning models that have resulted in a successful implementation of block scheduling (Queen, 1997), (Canady & Rettig, 1995), (Carrol, 1994). The first step is to choose a model of block scheduling that meets the needs of students and teachers. A number of models exist, but they all allow for flexible programs based on the needs of schools. There are several variations of block scheduling to examine. The standard 4 X 4 model consists of 4 ninety-minute classes, which last one quarter. The A/B model provides eight classes over one semester and rotates every other day. Periods 1-4 will be given on A days and periods 5-8 will be given on B days. Combination models also exist where students are offered both forty-five minute classes and ninety-minute classes at the same time. Many schools have utilized this scheduling model to accommodate teacher preference and subject matter accommodations.

Curriculum development also needs to be addressed prior to implementation. School districts must examine the possibilities of expanding course offerings. Many districts have taken advantage of course offerings that take place off school grounds such as university

opportunities for students (Queen & DiBiase+, 1999). This opportunity allows many students to receive college credit and credit towards graduation at the same time. Many schools have found that they cannot cover the same material under the block-scheduling model. This is to be expected and schools must design the curriculum accordingly.

Effective models also suggest scheduling implications for both teachers and students. Research has indicated that students do not do well when they have four required courses in one quarter. It is recommended that they be offered at least one elective course during each quarter. Also, teachers who are given more than two classes to prepare for each quarter have difficulty preparing for classes. Pacing guides are available for teachers to inform them of the amount of time that they should spend on each topic during instruction. This has helped many teachers manage their time and provide quality instruction to their students. These pacing guides provide reinforcement activities for teachers to utilize. Many teachers have been surprised by the fast pace that block scheduling provides within the classroom. Pacing guides recommend having additional lessons and activities readily

available for students. Having pacing guides available to staff has been an effective resource for teachers during the implementation of block scheduling.

Instructional strategies and lesson designs must also be reviewed prior to implementing block scheduling. Research has found that varying instructional activities within a block of instructions is the most effective method of retaining student attention. It has also been noted that teachers should use a minimum of five instructional strategies under block scheduling. It is not necessary that they use these all during a single block of instruction, but they should be used regularly. These activities are changed every 20-30 minutes during the period and allow students to move around the classroom. Research has also demonstrated that teachers who vary instructional activities is directly related to staff development prior to the implementation of block scheduling, and continued training after the implementation. Classrooms, which provide opportunities for cooperative learning, critical thinking, and active learning, are experiencing the greatest success with block scheduling. Cooperative grouping can be used as an

effective management tool. It allows for group sessions, teamwork, and collaborative learning. This can be used to break-up class sessions when used in short increments of time. The research indicated that students should be clear about their objectives before entering cooperative groups. This reduces discipline problems and keeps students on task. Also, teachers must monitor individuals in groups to ensure active participation in addition to the overall assignment of the group. Critical thinking activities allow the students to go beyond the typical receiving of information because they are required to analyze and find solutions in the learning process. Active learning allows the students to master tasks through the reinforcement of hands on activities. The teachers under this approach have become facilitators in the educational process rather than one who delivers information. Creating an environment that allows for creativity and flexibility is another important aspect of effective implementation. Varied instructional activities is part of this formula, but students must also be allowed to create their own learning opportunities and teachers must be willing to support and encourage this.

Classroom management has also become an issue with all of the activity within the classroom. Teachers must ensure that students are kept on task and are taking advantage of the extended learning times. Overall, discipline problems have decreased under block scheduling.

Assessment and evaluation are also important parts of the implementation process. Research data suggests that teachers use alternative and authentic assessment under the block scheduling model to ensure that students are evaluated in a holistic manner rather than the typical examination evaluation (Queen & DiBiase, 1999). Assessment should also be varied where student are evaluated on a variety of activities.

Administration also plays an important role in the implementation process. Principals must provide teachers with staff development time on effective block scheduling processes and monitor teachers to ensure that they are using pacing guides and varying their instruction. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Irmsher, 1996) recommends a minimum of two years for staff development prior to implementing block scheduling into a school. This

allows the concerns of every teacher to be addressed and also allows adequate time to train teachers for the new schedule. Principals must also take appropriate disciplinary action with teachers who are not following the basic principles necessary in block scheduling. The implementation will most certainly have strengths and weaknesses. The school and community have to constantly evaluate the process and improve on weaknesses that are identified. The success of block scheduling depends on the professionalism and attention that those involved give to it.

Research conducted by Canady & Rettig (1995), suggests the following prior to the implementation of block scheduling.

1. A general presentation of the pros and cons of various models of block scheduling.
2. Visits by teachers, students, parents, and school board members to schools having block scheduling.
3. Panel presentations by teachers from schools operating block schedules.
4. Faculty discussion meetings, leading to a vote or consensus.
5. Parent and community meetings regarding the implementation of block scheduling.

6. Assemblies for students conducted by students from other schools or by their peers who have visited other schools.
7. Distribution of relevant data and implementation procedures.
8. Staff development time focused on the appropriate design of curriculum and use of extended blocks of time for instruction.

Canady and Rettig further suggest that these items provide stakeholders with the opportunity to learn about the proposed innovations and discuss the ramifications, related to block scheduling, prior to implementation.

The review of literature also found seven factors that teachers described as significant in the staff development process (Stokes & Wilson, 1999). These types of training focused on the following items.

1. The overall concept of block scheduling.
2. The organization of a ninety-minute class period.
3. Alternative teaching strategies.
4. Pacing guides needed within block scheduling.
5. Alternative assessment techniques.

6. Presenting concepts rather than facts.

7. Alternative hands-on activities.

Staffing and Budget Concerns

Staffing and budget concerns are also issues for schools attempting to implement block scheduling. As stated in the introduction, additional FTE'S are inevitable under block scheduling. Every additional staff needed for block scheduling costs a district approximately \$40,000. The research also suggests that teacher development take place two years prior to implementation. This requires districts to begin to endure the financial burden of block scheduling before it is even implemented. Also, studies suggest that districts continue the training after the implementation. Unless districts are willing to sacrifice training time devoted to district goals, staff development for block scheduling will have to be paid at the contracted hourly rate.

The State of Texas has experienced financial problems as a result of implementing block scheduling. The Texas legislature has attempted to overcome these financial burdens by changing the teacher prep time requirements from

days to weeks (Smith, 1999). Now, teachers are required to receive 270 minutes of prep time per week opposed to 45 minutes per day. This has required teachers to teach without a planning period every other day. Teachers in Texas feel that this reduces their effectiveness in the classroom and defeats the purpose of block scheduling. Other legislation has required districts to provide additional compensation for teachers teaching on the block. An arbitration panel in Connecticut ruled that teachers were now required to teach six classes per year opposed to five under traditional scheduling and must be compensated for this (Cromwell, 1997). Despite teaching the same amount of time, the panel felt that they must be compensated for additional prep time.

Summary

Block scheduling has impacted schools in many ways. Proponents of block scheduling state that it improves the quality of instruction, quality of student work, and school atmosphere. Opponents argue that block scheduling does not do the students justice. In fact, many opponents feel that the benefits of block scheduling (increased graduation rates, standardized test scores, attendance, and varied instructional strategies) reflect good practice and not block scheduling.

Chapter Three

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The review of literature found many positive aspects of block scheduling, including increasing the effectiveness of teachers by enabling them to use different instructional strategies. This benefit produces students who are successful within the classroom. Students under block scheduling have increased attendance rates and perform better academically. Block scheduling also creates an atmosphere, which is more conducive to learning. Teachers have a more personal relationship with students and students feel more comfortable asking for the help that they need. Discipline problems, which are major concerns in many schools, have declined under the block-scheduling model.

The review of literature also found several disadvantages of block scheduling. Certain subject areas have a much greater difficulty using the block-scheduling model. These subject areas include mathematics and foreign language. Part of the problem may be the teachers implementing the model, but the effects are the same. Teachers who do not buy into the notion of block scheduling

report inability to cover adequate subject matter or inadequate comprehension by students. Opponents argue that students attention span is not conducive to block scheduling. Financial concerns are also an issue to consider when implementing block scheduling.

Recommendations

Based on the literature review, the researcher recommends to District 742 the implementation of block scheduling with the following specific recommendations.

1. The literature review stated the importance of community and staff support for block scheduling. To achieve this, the researcher recommends that informational meetings be provided to inform various stakeholders of the advantages of block scheduling. It is recommended that all staff, student council members, interested parents and community members be invited to attend these meetings. At this time, any concerns over the implications of block scheduling will be addressed.
2. The literature indicated that an initial step in implementing block scheduling was to choose an

appropriate model for your school. The researcher recommends that the district adopt the standard 4X4 model, which includes four ninety minute classes which lasts one quarter. The researcher feels that the other models reduce the quality of interaction between students and teachers by having them meet every other day. It is also recommended that the 4X4 model have the flexibility to include skinny (45 minute) classes that may be needed. This will overcome any strong opposition to block scheduling by uncomfortable staff. It will also accommodate subject matter problems related to block scheduling.

3. The researcher also recommends that staff development begin as soon as this proposal has been given the approval for implementation. It is further recommended that the district adopt staff development goals related to the advantages of block scheduling for the year prior to implementation. This will alleviate any need for additional money or time invested in addition staff development during this period. It is also recommended that the district purchase pacing guides to be used during the staff development training. The training will be conducted

- for one year prior to implementation of block scheduling. To overcome any concerns related to the ability to retain the attention of students, it is recommended that a great deal of staff development time be spent on various instructional strategies and the importance of multiple activities within a block of instruction. During this time, it is also recommended that administrators, teachers and the student council be provided the opportunity to visit schools which operate under block scheduling. They will then conduct briefings to their peers based on their observations and findings.
4. The district will also need to establish an evaluative team for block scheduling. The team will meet to discuss the progress of block scheduling. It will also address any problems with its implementation and provide recommendations for solutions to these problems. The researcher recommends that this team consist of as many individuals as possible who have knowledge of or past experience with block scheduling.
 5. The only disadvantage of block scheduling that the researcher feels cannot be manipulated is the concern

over financial issues related to the implementation of block scheduling. An increase in FTE's are inevitable under the block-scheduling model. Additionally, if the implementation of block scheduling is to be effective, adequate dollars for staff development must also be allocated. The review of literature found very little data related to the actual cost that a district might expect to endure under block scheduling. Therefore, prior to any attempts to implement block scheduling the researcher recommends that the district conduct a cost analysis of the implementation of block scheduling which includes both additional staff and staff development costs. The results of the cost analysis will be presented to the school board, which will examine the effectiveness and the efficiency of block scheduling. The board will then make a determination whether or not the proposal will go forward.

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