

Block Scheduling

In the past few decades, many public secondary schools nationwide have implemented block scheduling. Block scheduling divides the school day into longer class periods than the standard sixty-minute periods. Approximately one-fourth of secondary schools in Iowa have block scheduling.¹ This IPRO report lists some of the common types of block scheduling and summarizes the reported advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling.

Types of Block Scheduling

The block scheduling method consists of arranging the school day so that at least part of the day consists of class periods longer than the traditional length of sixty minutes or less.² Some of the common forms of block scheduling are listed below.³

- Four ninety-minute class blocks per day. The school year is then divided into two semesters rather than year-long courses.
- A mixture of standard and large blocks. Some classes, such as band, typing, or foreign language, are often taught daily, while other classes are in longer blocks on alternate days.
- Block periods with classes rotating every other day.

Reported Advantages of Block Scheduling:^{4,5}

Proponents of block scheduling contend that longer class periods:

- Enhance students learning and encourage students to ask more questions.
- Give teachers more one-on-one time with students.
- Encourage variation in teaching techniques and in-class instruction.
- Result in less homework each night for students.

¹ Hackmann, Donald. "Secondary School Scheduling Trends: Tales of Two Midwestern States." Education Resource Information Center (2000).

² Cawelti, Gordon. *High School Restructuring: A National Study*. Arlington, Virginia: Educational Research Service, 1994.

³ Canday, Robert Lynn, and Michael D. Rettig. *Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools*. Princeton, New Jersey: Eye on Education, 1995.

⁴ Thompson, Steve. "Pros and Cons of Block Scheduling in Junior High and High School." Associated Content. 11 Apr. 2007. 20 Nov. 2008
<http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/201292/pros_and_cons_of_block_scheduling_in.html?cat=4>.

⁵ Kelly, Melissa. "Modular (Block) Schedules." About.com. The New York Times Company. 20 Nov. 2008
<<http://712educators.about.com/cs/blockschedule/a/blockschedule.htm>>.

Reported Disadvantages of Block Scheduling⁶

Opponents of block scheduling contend that longer class periods:

- Are not consistent with literature that shows the average attention span of young adults is less than an hour.
- Leave too much time between classes if the classes meet every other day, leading students to forget information between classes.
- Leave too much time between courses in the same subject if students only take one class in that subject each year. For example, under block scheduling a class that would traditionally be taught in sixty minute periods all year long might be taught in a two hour class in one semester, thus meaning that students might not take the next course in this subject for up to nine months, leading to low retention.
- Puts a hardship on students transferring mid-year between block and non-block schools.
- Puts a hardship on students who are ill for short periods because missing a block is often the equivalent to missing two traditional periods.

Conclusion

In the end, it is unclear whether block scheduling is an improvement over traditional scheduling. There have not been many studies that have systematically compared the effectiveness of the two methods and what little work has been done presents mixed results. Measuring the effectiveness of the methods is made more complex because different students learn best under different methods.

⁶ Lindsay, Jeff. "The Case Against Block Scheduling." JeffLindsay.com. 3 May 2008. 20 Nov. 2008
<<http://www.jefflindsay.com/block.shtml>>.