



## **School Board Work Session Scheduling**

### **Issue Brief**

This issue brief will provide a summary on different types of block schedules. The report will describe the differences between an alternating A/B and 4 x 4 schedules. There will also be a summary of the schedules for all 9 - 12 high schools in the state of Virginia.

### **Block Scheduling**

The movement to block scheduling began for middle and high schools in the 1990's. The basic premise of block scheduling is that students have fewer classes per day for a longer period of time, usually 85 to 90 minutes. The intended result is for students to receive more teaching time due to fewer class changes and preparation. Data supports that fewer class changes result in fewer discipline referrals and disruption to the school day.

Several other issues also prompted the motivation for block scheduling: better preparation of students for taking end-of-course standardized tests, teacher pay, and school funding. Some districts made the switch in schedules based on research to allow for more student-directed cooperative learning versus the traditional teacher-delivered curriculum. Researcher's project that instruction in traditional single schedules becomes fragmented due to the shorter periods.

One way of implementing a block is through the use of an A/B schedule (Figure 1). Instead of taking 8 classes per day, students take 4 classes every other day. This type of schedule can work for a 6 or 7 period day as well. Another form of block scheduling is the 4 x 4 (Figure 2) in which students take 4 subjects every day for the first semester and then take a different 4 subjects the second semester. Advantages to a 4 x 4 include students carrying a lighter class load each semester while teachers prepare for fewer classes and students in a semester.

In the late 2000's, some school systems switched back to 6, 7, and 8 period schedules. Criticisms of block schedules have included the idea that class periods exceed the attention span of students, having a negative effect on retention along with the effect of

a watered down curriculum. Research says that students’ active involvement is the key to student learning and success.

Critics of block schedules say teachers struggle with keeping students actively engaged for larger blocks, and students using A/B schedules lack daily exposure to content. Other opponents of “the block” make the point that students who are absent from school will miss considerable amounts of material in just one class meeting and will struggle with catching up the learning.

Skeptics of schools that are doing 4 x 4 schedules are worried that students may go for weeks or months without instruction in more sequential subjects such as math or world languages. The College Board reported that students taking AP courses on a 4 x 4 schedule scored lower than students on a traditional schedule. Some schools have altered schedules by making AP courses year long, doubling the amount of learning time while reducing, however, the number of courses a student can take.

**Figure 1 – AB Scheduling**

| <b>Block Scheduling A/B</b> |                 |               |                 |               |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Time                        | Monday (A)      | Tuesday (B)   | Wednesday (A)   | Thursday (B)  | Friday (A)      |
| Block 1                     | World History I | Photography   | World History I | Photography   | World History I |
| Block 2                     | Algebra I       | English 9     | Algebra I       | English 9     | Algebra I       |
| Block 3                     | Band            | Spanish II    | Band            | Spanish II    | Band            |
| Block 4                     | Health & PE     | Earth Science | Health & PE     | Earth Science | Health & PE     |

**Figure 2 – 4 x 4 Scheduling**

| <b>Block Scheduling 4x4 – Semester 1</b> |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Time                                     | Monday          | Tuesday         | Wednesday       | Thursday        | Friday          |
| Block 1                                  | World History I | World History I | World History I | World History I | World History I |
| Block 2                                  | Algebra I       | Algebra I       | Algebra I       | Algebra I       | Algebra I       |
| Block 3                                  | Band            | Band            | Band            | Band            | Band            |
| Block 4                                  | Health & PE     | Health & PE     | Health & PE     | Health & PE     | Health & PE     |

| <b>Block Scheduling 4x4 – Semester 2</b> |               |               |               |               |               |
|------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Time                                     | Monday        | Tuesday       | Wednesday     | Thursday      | Friday        |
| Block 1                                  | Photography   | Photography   | Photography   | Photography   | Photography   |
| Block 2                                  | English 9     | English 9     | English 9     | English 9     | English 9     |
| Block 3                                  | Spanish II    | Spanish II    | Spanish II    | Spanish II    | Spanish II    |
| Block 4                                  | Earth Science | Earth Science | Earth Science | Earth Science | Earth Science |

### Summary of High School Scheduling in Virginia

In the fall of 2005, information was gathered as part of the *Study of Innovative High School Scheduling in Virginia*. All 311 high schools (grades 9 – 12) in Virginia were accounted for in the study.

| <b>Single Period Schedules</b> |                   |                        |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|                                | Number of Schools | Percentage             |
| 6 Period                       | 6 (8)             | 1.93% (2..61%)         |
| 7 Period                       | 60(66)            | 19.2% (21.57%)         |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>66 (74)</b>    | <b>21.22% (24.18%)</b> |

| <b>Block Schedules</b> |                   |                        |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|                        | Number of Schools | Percentage             |
| 7 A/B Block            | 89 (94)           | 28.62% (30.72%)        |
| 8 A/B Block            | 58 (42)           | 18.65% (13.73%)        |
| 4 x 4 Block            | 95 (93)           | 30.55% ( 30.39%)       |
| Other Block            | 3 (3)             | 0.96% (0.98%)          |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>245 (232)</b>  | <b>78.78% (75.82%)</b> |

Note: Numbers in parentheses denote 2004/2005 totals.

| Changed From | Schools Changing Schedules |          |          |          |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|              | To 7 Period                | To 7 A/B | To 8 A/B | To 4 x 4 |
| 6 Period     | 9                          |          | 7        | 1        |
| 7 Period     | --                         | 2        | 11       | 6        |
| 6 A/B        |                            | 8        | 2        | 1        |
| 7 A/B        | 1                          | --       | 20       | 6        |
| 8 A/B        | 3                          | 2        | --       | 2        |
| 4 x 4        | 3                          | 9        | 2        | --       |

### Local Schools

Green County: William Monroe – 7 Period

Charlottesville City: Charlottesville – 7 A/B

Rockingham County: Broadway – 7 A/B

Rockingham County: Spotswood – 7 A/B

Rockingham County: Turner Ashby – 7 A/B

Waynesboro City: Waynesboro – 7 A/B

Augusta County: Buffalo Gap – 4 x 4

Augusta County: Fort Defiance – 4 x 4

Augusta County: Riverheads – 4 x 4

Augusta County: Stuarts Draft – 4 x 4

Augusta County: Wilson Memorial – 4 x 4

Fluvanna County: Fluvanna – 4 x 4

Harrisonburg City: Harrisonburg – 4 x 4

Louisa County: Louisa – 4 x 4

Madison County: Madison – 4 x 4

Nelson County: Nelson – 4 x 4

Orange County: Orange – 4 x 4

Nelson County: Nelson – Offers 3 year long periods one hour in length and two 90-minute blocks offering semester classes.

## **Breakout Sessions**

### **Breakout Session 1 – Elementary: Time Considerations in Building a Schedule**

Debbie Collins will lead a discussion with elementary principals addressing the time issues involved in elementary scheduling.

- music, art, health and PE
- reading and math
- RTI and intervention periods
- Responsive Classroom
- Extended Learning Time (ELT)

### **Breakout Session 2 – Middle/High: Sharing of Resources**

Matt Haas will lead a discussion with middle school principals concerning middle school schedules and the sharing of teachers/staff.

- What is the current sharing of staff and other resources between and among middle and high schools within feeder patterns?
- Do schools share synchronous course technology?
- Do schools share asynchronous course technology?
- What are the factors that affect whether schools within a feeder pattern can effectively and efficiently share staff?
- What are the factors that affect whether schools share staff across feeder patterns?
- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of sharing staff?

### **Breakout Session 3 – High/CATEC: Coordinating Schedules**

Billy Haun will lead a discussion with CATE administration and high school principals concerning coordination between these schools and CATEC.

- What are the current high school schedules? Similarities and differences?
- What are the factors that cause the three comprehensive high schools to have different schedules?
- What is the current CATEC schedule and how is it coordinated between the three Albemarle County Schools and other school divisions?
- How can we further look at coordinating the CATEC and high school schedule and services?
- Is there a different model for providing CATEC curriculum/services rather than have all students physically go to CATEC?
- How is technology being used or implemented to provide services?