
# BLOCK SCHEDULING PROPOSAL for 2021-2022

DRAFT

DEXTER HIGH SCHOOL
2200 N. PARKER RD
DEXTER, MI 48130

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## Proposal

Adopt a block schedule for DHS starting in the 2021-2022 school year.

## Background

Dexter High School moved to a 6-period day in 2012 from a trimester schedule. At the time, the decision was made due to changes brought about by the adoption of the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Throughout his/her academic career at DCS, a student studies in longer blocks of learning time through K-6, formally moves into a pure-block schedule at Mill Creek, moves to a 6-period per day schedule at DHS, then into postsecondary schedules that function in longer blocks. The high school level is the only point of a students' academic career where a bell rings and kids move every hour. The current schedule we use is guided by efficiency and not driven by student learning. This proposal is the culmination of several District initiatives to address student needs. In 2018-2019, the District began deliberate work around student mental health. As part of that process, DCS embarked on a community-wide book study of Dr. David Gleason's "At What Cost: Defending Adolescent Development in Fiercely Competitive Schools." This book study and Dr. Gleason's community presentations addressed the need for school districts to demonstrate developmental empathy. Two of the recommendations made by Dr. Gleason to better support our students are directly addressed in this proposal: changing to a block schedule and addressing adolescents' need for sleep.

Next, DCS has been committed to providing individualized and innovative learning opportunities to our students in all grade levels. In the past few years, we've seen an expansion of opportunities to DCS students in the lower grades, the addition of an alternative education program, and the start of the Dexter Early Middle College this year. DHS staff have been researching and visiting other schools while working to scale instructional delivery changes on behalf of students. After visits and conversations with schools throughout the country (Kentucky, Texas, Arizona, Wisconsin, Michigan, Colorado, California, Ohio, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, etc), engagement with EdLeader21, several trips to Bloomfield Hills High School and a visit to Kettle Moraine (WI) just prior to the pandemic, the next step in our journey is to change to a block schedule while embracing a comprehensive commitment to continuous improvement.

The proposal to move to a block schedule identifies the rationale for making a change in schedules to better meet the learning and social-emotional needs of our students.

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# Rationale

## Why We Should Move to a Block Schedule for Dexter Kids:

- Throughout the At What Cost book study, the conversation regarding adolescent mental health focused on the over-scheduled nature of a student's everyday life. A recommendation was made to move to a block schedule to reduce the daily academic load on students by reducing the number of classes per day (Gleason, 2017).
- Research conducted by EAB reported that schools with block schedules report allowed students to take more courses throughout their four-year high school career while having flexibility and easing their course load-related stress.
- The EAB study also showed that "Contacts at profiled schools emphasize that the block schedule model allows teachers to employ more interactive and project-based learning strategies in the classroom. Interactive classroom strategies include Socratic discussions, hands-on labs, and real-world problem solving. Block schedule models provide teachers with time to include active learning activities in addition to direct instruction to better engage students and deepen learning."
- Through embracing what we've learned with regard to asynchronous and online learning, we anticipate being able to offer opportunities for students to select a late start as part of the block schedule. We are also working on a bus drop-off change to move the high school start time after the elementary start time (if logistically possible).
- The block schedule provides more time for students to explore personalized learning through elective courses. The structures allow students to enter into concentrations of study that represent their personal interest and future plans. With longer class times and additional credit accumulation, block schedules can open avenues for innovation in high school curricula. The block schedule model allows for possibilities to implement an integrated curriculum, and/or the creation courses focused on social and emotional learning to support student success.
- It is believed the block schedule model better prepares their students for the typical college course schedule, where courses meet in large blocks of time and do not typically meet daily. The longer class periods coupled with increased flexibility in course selection make a block schedule model like the typical college schedule.
- A block schedule model increases course capacity for students. Students can accrue more credits in a block schedule versus a traditional schedule. This provides students with more flexibility in course selection and can more easily make up courses should they perform poorly.

- By changing the schedule to allow for longer learning periods, we will be able to simultaneously facilitate a comprehensive professional development plan for our staff to successfully transition to supporting student learning in the new format.
- The change in the building schedule provides time to allow for collaboration of staff to enhance educational opportunities for students by creating “Learning communities” to work collaboratively to produce inter curricular opportunities that span each of the courses in which our students are enrolled.
- The change to a block schedule eliminates the need for zero-hour courses, which helps to address appropriate school start times for adolescents.
- The change to longer learning blocks creates additional opportunities to create work/internship opportunities during the school day, allows students to explore interests in sports, performing arts, and other electives, and creates new student supports to meet the needs of students who need remediation or additional help/support.

# Key Components

A change in planning time would be part of a block schedule of four classes per day for students, with teachers having three classes per day and one non-teaching period per day, totaling 900 minutes of non-teaching time over a two-week period. In order to have the same planning as grades 7-8, those 900 minutes would be divided between 580 planning minutes every two weeks with 320 minutes of staff collaboration/meeting time built into those two weeks.

## Mandatory Meeting Times

### Learning Community Meeting

As we work through the schedule transitions of shifting from the 6-period day to a block schedule, we will work toward building a structure that allows each team (structure tbd) to meet once per week to discuss students within their respective learning community. The teacher will also have regularly scheduled meetings.  This will take up to 3 years to fully evolve into a longer-term structure.

### Curriculum Meeting Times

Each learning community will meet once a week to discuss curriculum planning.  Look for common themes in instructions and develop interdisciplinary goals.

### Limit of AP/IB Courses

Students will be limited to no more than 6 AP/IB Courses per year. A primary driver for making this change is concern for adolescent mental health. DCS engaged EAB to conduct a research study of the 5 most-frequently attended universities for our students that included limiting the number of AP/IB courses students took per year on admission. The study found that this limitation will not negatively impact our students regarding university admission. The study is attached to this proposal and is titled “The Impacts of School-Provided GPA, Class Rank, and Advanced Course Limits on Admissions Decisions.”

If permitted by pupil accounting rules, occasional asynchronous Wednesdays will be offered on a rotating basis at times when the flow of the school year could best serve students, instructionally.

## Increased District Costs

After analysis of current class sizes (in the 19-20 and 20-21 school year), it is anticipated that moving to a block schedule will require the addition of 3.0 - 5.0 teaching FTE. At an average cost per new hire teacher of $84,615 per new hire, the total additional staffing cost is anticipated to be $253,845 - $423,075. As a matter of note, the District reported a decrease in DEA FTE of 3.5 for the 2020-2021 school year at a decrease in cost of $384,386.

## Training Plan

We will utilize scheduled staff development days, summer training opportunities, and other staff meeting time to do all of the following:

- Provide staff with training from the outside on how best to teach in a block schedule
- Provide opportunities to share from colleagues who are ahead of other staff in their journey
- Share practices within and across departments
- Continue to gather and review feedback from staff as we proceed through year to help address issues and bring in outside training as needed
- A significant amount of time at the beginning of the school year will be devoted to staff preparation

Between approval and Fall 2021:

- Continue to work with staff on the 5E instructional framework.

- Design instructional coaching model for Fall 2021that is targeted specifically toward implementing a block schedule
- Begin creation of PLCs and/or Critical Friends Groups (CFGs)
- Select external support partner(s) for technical support of the 5 E instructional framework and PLCs/CFGs
- Create summer/start of the year training plan
- Work on Graduation Requirements and any necessary policy changes

In 2021-2022:

- Share 3-year training schedule/plan
- Finalize graduation requirements and policy changes (as needed)
- Begin instructional coaching model for implementing a block schedule
- Set up series of site visits to schools who have been effectively using block schedules
- Create peer classroom visit model with clear “look fors”

In 2022-2023:

- Revise and continue implementing the 3-year training schedule/plan
- Revise and continue implementing the instructional coaching model
- Continue site visits
- Revise and continue peer classroom visit model with clear “look fors”

In 2023-2024:

- Conduct a 3 year evaluation
- Revise training plan (as needed)

Cost for this training will be part of the district professional development budget and will be provided using DHS funds (including carryover funds from previous years).

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# Structure

## A/B Block Schedule

In an A/B schedule, students are able to take 4 classes each day, for a total of 8 classes. Over the course of two weeks, students will have each of their classes 5 times. During this time students will be able to work collaboratively with peers and instructors to access instructional support and group project time. Our goal would eventually be able to add an advisory period where students could access support from teachers for academics as well as social-emotional needs.

| Proposed Example of DHS A/B Block Schedule | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
| Week One | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A |
| Week Two | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B |
| Week Three | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A |
| Week Four | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B |

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## Proposed DHS Schedule

| Example A/B Block Daily Schedule for DHS | |
|---|---|
| **Block** | **Bell Schedule** |
| One | **1st: (8:00am - 9:30am)** |
| Two | **2nd:(9:35am - 11:05am)** |
| Three | **3rd: (11:10am -1:17pm)**<br>**Lunch**<br>**A 11:10-11:40**<br>**B 11:58-12:28**<br>**C 12:47-1:17** |
| Four | **4th: (1:22pm - 2:52pm)** |

| Credit Schedule - 4 year plan |
|---|
| 2020-21 School Year – **22.0** out of 24.0 possible<br>(18.0 from Michigan Merit Curriculum; 2.0 elective credits) |
| 2021-22 School Year – **23.0** out of 26.0 possible<br>(18.0 from Michigan Merit Curriculum; 3.0 elective credits) |
| 2022-23 School Year – **25.0** out of 28.0 possible<br>(18.0 from Michigan Merit Curriculum; 3.0 elective credits) |
| 2023-24 School Year – **27.0** out of 30.0 possible<br>(18.0 from Michigan Merit Curriculum; 3.0 elective credits) |
| 2024-25 School Year – **29.0** out of 32.0 possible<br>(18.0 from Michigan Merit Curriculum; 3.0 elective credits) |
| *No changes in MMC courses proposed at this time |
| *Note: 22.0 out of 24.0 credits equates to 91.6% of available credits.*<br>*The phase-in reflects this percentage or slightly lower for each year consistently.* |

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## Student Schedule Sample

| Example A/B Block for a DHS Freshman | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | American History A | English 9A | American History B | English 9B |
| Two | Biology A | Varsity Band A | Biology B | Varsity Band B |
| Three | Elective | Geometry A | Elective | Geometry B |
| Four | Spanish II A | Elective | Spanish II B | Elective |

| Example A/B Block for a DHS Sophomore | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | World History A | World Lit & Comp | World History B | World Lit & Speech |
| Two | Symphonic Band A | Chemistry A | Symphonic Band B | Chemistry B |
| Three | Adv Alg 2A | Elective | Adv Alg 2B | Elective |
| Four | Elective | Spanish II A | Elective | Spanish II B |

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| Example A/B Block for a DHS Junior | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | IB World Religions A | Pre Calc A | IB World Religions B | Pre Calc B |
| Two | Economics | Intro to Anatomy & Physiology | American Government | Strength & Conditioning |
| Three | ULLC 11 A | Health & Wellness | ULLC 11 B | Adv Bio:Zoology |
| Four | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective |

| Example A/B Block for a DHS IB Diploma Jr. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | IB English SL A | IB Math | IB English SL B | IB Math |
| Two | Symphonic Band | IB 20th Cent WH | Symphonic Band | IB 20th Cent WH |
| Three | IB Spanish A | IB Chem | IB Spanish B | IB Chem |
| Four | Elective | Elective | Elective | TOK |

| Example A/B Block for a DHS Senior | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | Pre-Calc A | Speech | Pre Calc B | Statistics |
| Two | ULLC 12 A | Elective | ULLC 12 B | Elective |
| Three | Elective | MultiMedia Journalism A | Elective | MultiMedia Journalism A |
| Four | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective |

| Example A/B Block for a DHS IB Diploma Sr. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | IB Math | IB English HL A | IB Math | IB English HL B |
| Two | IB 20th Cent WH HL 2 | Concert Orchestra | IB 20th Cent WH HL 2 | Concert Orchestra |
| Three | IB Chem HL A | IB Spanish HL A | IB Chem HL B | IB Spanish HL B |
| Four | TOK | Elective | Elective | Elective |

| Example A/B Block for a DHS Consortium Student | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | Building Trades A | Building Trades A | Building Trades B | Building Trades B |
| Two | Building Trades A | Building Trades A | Building Trades B | Building Trades B |
| Three | ULLC 12 A | Sr. Math Credit | ULLC 12 B | Elective |
| Four | Elective | Elective | Elective | Elective |

| Example A/B Block for a DHS Social Studies Teacher | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | American History A | American History A | American History B | American History B |
| Two | Prep | Prep | Prep | Prep |
| Three | American History A | American History A | American History B | American History B |
| Four | World History A | World History A | World History B | World History B |

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| Example A/B Block for a DHS English Teacher | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | English 9A | English 9A | English 9B | English 9B |
| Two | Prep | Prep | Prep | Prep |
| Three | English 9A | English 9A | English 9B | English 9B |
| Four | ULLC 12 A | ULLC 12 A | ULLC 12 B | ULLC 12 B |

| Traditional 6-Period Day | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| hour | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
| One | Varsity Band | Varsity Band | Varsity Band | Varsity Band | Varsity Band |
| Two | American History 9A | American History 9A | American History 9A | American History 9A | American History 9A |
| Three | English 9A | English 9A | English 9A | English 9A | English 9A |
| Four | Geometry 9A | Geometry 9A | Geometry 9A | Geometry 9A | Geometry 9A |
| Five | Biology A | Biology A | Biology A | Biology A | Biology A |
| Six | Spanish II A | Spanish II A | Spanish II A | Spanish II A | Spanish II A |

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| Daily Time Schedule for a 6-Period Day | |
|---|---|
| **Hour** | **Bell Schedule** |
| Zero | 7:00am - 7:55am |
| One | 8:00am - 8:57am |
| Two | 9:02am - 9:59am |
| Three | 10:04am - 11:01am |
| Four | 11:06am -12:45pm<br>Lunch<br>A 11:06-11:35am<br>B 11:40-12:10pm<br>C 12:15-12:45pm |
| Five | 12:50-1:49pm<br>*2 minutes for announcements |
| Six | 1:54-2:52pm |

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## Research

"Asking teachers and administrators to increase academic performance for students without **fundamentally altering the conditions** under which they failed to produce student learning in the first place is a dead end," (Elmore, 217).

"Under [our current policy conditions], "change" can become an attractive nuisance… This view of policymaking as "change making" also dovetails nicely with the pathologies of the governance structure for education in the United States… [educational leaders] seek approval and recognition by **proposing agendas of "change" that maximize public visibility but minimize actual impact on instructional practice**," (Elmore, 218).

"This work [improving student performance & the quality of teaching and learning] is hard, precisely because it is counter-cultural in virtually every respect: it requires the mobilization and use of knowledge that is not presently in schools and classrooms, it requires the active engagement of people whose knowledge is primarily about teaching and learning rather than about the tailoring of ideas to an unstable political environment, **and it requires the design and operation of institutional structures that alter the way people learn to do their work**," (Elmore, 218-219).

"In the default mode, the governance and organizational structure of American education is **all about change and not much about improvement**… The problem of American education is not… that the schools and people in them "resist change"... School boards, superintendents, and principals are all **rewarded and reinforced for "changing" routinely** and promiscuously. **The problem is that schools are poorly equipped to *improve* the conditions of teaching and learning for teachers and students**," (Elmore, 219).

"Unfortunately, the bureaucratic school created at the turn of the 20th century **was not organized to meet the needs for intellectual development or for individual responsiveness**. Most of today's schools were designed when the **goal of education was not to educate all students well but to batch process a great many efficiently**, selecting and supporting only a few for "thinking" work. Strategies for sorting and tracking students were developed… **Teaching work was designed to be routine**, with little need for professional skill and judgement, and no built-in structures for developing these abilities," (Darling-Hammond, 237).

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## EAB Studies (attached)

- The Impacts of School-Provided GPA, Class Rank, and Advanced Course Limits on Admissions Decisions at Midsize and Large Universities in the Midwest. (Commissioned specifically for DHS)
- AB Block Schedules for High Schools
- Preparing Teachers for Effective Block Schedule Implementation

## Additional Resources


- Landry, Tracey K., "BLOCK SCHEDULING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY HIGH SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN" (2016). *Dissertations*. 199.

# The Impacts of School-Provided GPA, Class Rank, and Advanced Course Limits on Admissions Decisions

At Midsize and Large Universities in the Midwest

District Leadership Forum

**Teresa Liu**
*Research Associate*

**Olivia Rios**
*Senior Research Manager*

# Table of Contents

# 1) Executive Overview

## Key Observations

**Although admissions officers vary in their consideration of GPA, contacts at all profiled postsecondary institutions report that differences in GPA scales and weighting do not negatively impact students' likelihood of admission.** Profiled institutions follow three distinct grade point average (GPA) consideration approaches: *automatic*, *standardized*, and *comprehensive*.

- *Automatic:* At **Central Michigan University**, **Michigan Technological University**, and **Northern Michigan University**, admissions officers automatically accept school-provided GPA (i.e., weighted and unweighted) if provided GPA is on a 4.0 scale.
- *Standardized:* At **Michigan State University**, the **University of Michigan**, and **Western Michigan University**, admissions officers recalculate a new, standardized GPA for every applicant. Admissions officers at Michigan State University and Western Michigan University then add their own weight for advanced courses (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB)).
- *Comprehensive*: At **Purdue University**, admissions officers consider grade trends and course rigor as stronger indicators of academic achievement than cumulative GPA.

**Contacts report eliminating class rank does not disadvantage students' likelihood of admissions at profiled institutions.** Contacts at most profiled institutions acknowledge the growing trend of high schools eliminating class rank. While contacts at Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, Purdue University, and the University of Michigan report that admissions officers do consider class rank (when provided), they do not mandate that schools provide class rank. Contacts at all profiled institutions emphasize that eliminating class rank does not negatively impact applicants' likelihood of admissions.

**Contacts report establishing an advanced course limit does not disadvantage students' likelihood of admissions at profiled institutions.** Admissions officers at Central Michigan University, Michigan Technological University, and Northern Michigan University prioritize final course grades, such as cumulative GPA, over course rigor. Therefore, admissions officers at these three profiled institutions do not review advanced courses as part of the admissions process. Contacts at Purdue University, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan University note that admissions officers use their knowledge of an advanced course limit at a school to inform their understanding of the curriculum offerings students can choose from. Thus, limiting advanced courses does not negatively impact applicants in the admissions process at all profiled institutions.

**Clearly communicate any changes in grading techniques, class rank, and/or advanced course offerings to admissions officers.** Contacts at profiled institutions recommend that school administrators reach out directly to their regional admissions counselor and communicate policy changes in the school's secondary school report and/or school profile. By clearly explaining any new policy to admissions officers, school administrators ensure that they do not disadvantage their students in the admissions process.

# 2) School-Provided GPA

## Impact on Admissions

### Most Profiled Institutions Use GPA to Assess Applicant Academic Achievement as Part of the Admissions Process

All profiled institutions (except **Purdue University**, which deemphasizes cumulative grade point average (GPA) and instead focuses on course rigor and grade trends) use GPA to evaluate applicants' academic achievement. Contacts at multiple profiled institutions explain that high school GPA is one of the strongest predictors of student success in college. For example, contacts at **Northern Michigan University** note that the institution recently studied outcomes data of enrolled students and found a strong, positive correlation between high school GPA and academic achievement in college.

### Due to Institutions' Conversion and/or Recalculation of GPA, Differences in GPA Scales and Weighting Do Not Disadvantage Students in the Admissions Process

Admissions officers at **Central Michigan University**, **Michigan State University**, **Michigan Technological University**, Northern Michigan University, the **University of Michigan**, and **Western Michigan University** all evaluate applicants' GPA on a 4.0 scale (i.e., through conversion or recalculation of GPA). Thus, contacts at these institutions report that using different GPA scales (e.g., 5.0, 11.0) does not negatively impact students' likelihood of admissions.

In addition, contacts at these six profiled institutions state that using different weighting systems (i.e., weighted or unweighted) does not disadvantage students in the admissions process. Some profiled institutions accept both weighted and unweighted GPAs on a 4.0 scale, while others recalculate to add their own weighting.

Below are the GPA consideration approaches at profiled institutions. For the purposes of this report, they are organized into three categories: automatic, standardized, and comprehensive.

- In an **automatic** review, admissions officers automatically accept school-provided GPA (i.e., weighted and unweighted) if it is on a 4.0 scale.
- In a **standardized** review, admissions officers recalculate a new, standardized GPA for every applicant. Often, admissions officers add their own weight for advanced courses (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB)).
- In a **comprehensive** admissions review, admissions officers consider grade trends and strength of overall curriculum as stronger indicators of academic achievement than cumulative GPA. Admissions officers determine strength of overall curriculum by reviewing student transcripts.

- In this report, to **convert** GPA is to perform a purely mathematical calculation to change the numerical scale of school-provided GPA (e.g., 5.0, 11.0) to a 4.0 scale (see **page 7**).
- To **recalculate** GPA is to generate a new GPA based on selected courses (e.g., core courses) on the transcript. Admissions officers often assign their own weight to advanced courses (e.g., AP, IB).

## GPA Consideration Approaches at Profiled Institutions

### Automatic

**Used by** Central Michigan University, Michigan Technological University, Northern Michigan University

**GPA Conversion/Recalculation Process:**

- **Profiled institutions accept any GPA on a 4.0 scale** (i.e., including both weighted and unweighted).
- If both weighted and unweighted GPA are provided, admissions officers at all three profiled institutions use the higher GPA.
- Admissions officers at Central Michigan University cap all GPAs at 4.0 (i.e., any GPA higher than 4.0 is entered as 4.0).

**Strategies to Process GPAs Not on a 4.0 Scale:**

- Admissions officers at Central Michigan University recalculate an unweighted GPA (i.e., accounting for all courses) on a 4.0 scale.
- Admissions officers at Northern Michigan University and Michigan Technological University convert to GPA on a 4.0 scale, but preserve school weighting/unweighting (e.g., if a school provides weighted GPA on a 5.0 scale, admissions officers convert to weighted GPA on a 4.0 scale).

### Standardized

**Used by** Michigan State University, University of Michigan, Western Michigan University

**GPA Conversion/Recalculation Process:**

- **Profiled institutions recalculate all GPAs to a 4.0 scale.**
- Admissions officers at Michigan State University and Western Michigan University add additional weight to advanced courses (e.g., AP, IB).

### Comprehensive

**Used by** Purdue University

**GPA Conversion/Recalculation Process:**

- **Emphasizes rigor of courses and grade trends (e.g., core classes, non-core classes related to intended major) over cumulative GPA.**
- For example, if a student intends to study nursing but consistently received low grades in the sciences, admissions officers would consider that grade trend when evaluating preparedness for the nursing program.

  Admissions officers accept school-provided GPA. They convert GPAs to an unweighted 4.0 scale only for reporting purposes (i.e., creating profile of freshmen class, submitting admissions data for institution ranking purposes).

Admissions officers at both Michigan Technological University and Northern Michigan University (i.e., automatic GPA approach) use the following mathematical process to convert school-provided GPAs to a 4.0 scale.

### GPA Conversion Process at Michigan Technological University and Northern Michigan University

1. Student presents a **5.25** weighted GPA on a 5.0 scale from their high school transcript.
2. Admissions officers convert the weighted 5.25 GPA to a 4.0 scale (while still retaining weighting) by performing the following calculations:
   - **5.25** / 5 = 1.05
   - 1.05 x 4 = **4.2**
3. Admissions officers enter the new GPA, **4.2**, in the student information system. This information is also used for state and federal reporting.

In contrast, admissions officers at Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan University (i.e., standardized GPA approach) recalculate a new, standardized GPA for every applicant.

### GPA Recalculation at Profiled Institutions with Standardized Approach

| Institution | GPA Recalculation Process |
|---|---|
| Michigan State University | • Recalculates GPA by **only considering core courses** (i.e., English, science, social studies, math, foreign language).<br>• Adds additional weight to AP and IB courses. |
| Western Michigan University | • Recalculates GPA by **considering all courses**.<br>• Adds additional weight to honors, AP, IB, and Dual Enrollment courses in which a student has earned a "C" or higher.<br>• If the recalculated GPA is lower than school-provided GPA on a 4.0 scale, admissions officers use the school-provided GPA. |
| University of Michigan | • Recalculates GPA by considering all courses.<br>• **Does not add additional weight** to advanced courses. |

## Most Profiled Institutions Consider GPA When Allocating Merit-Based Scholarships

Contacts at the majority of profiled institutions report that scholarship decision-makers consider GPA when allocating merit-based scholarships. Scholarship decision-makers at most profiled institutions also consider other criteria, such as standardized test scores (i.e., SAT, ACT).

**Merit-Based Scholarship Considerations at Profiled Institutions**

| Institution | GPA | Standardized Test Scores (i.e., SAT, ACT) | Other Criteria (if Applicable) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Central Michigan University** | ☑ | | |
| **Northern Michigan University** | ☑ | | |
| **Michigan Technological University** | ☑ | ☑ | |
| **Western Michigan University** | ☑ | ☑ | |
| **Michigan State University** | ☑ | ☑ | • Application essay |
| **University of Michigan** | ☑ | | • Academic achievement<br>• Special talents<br>• Interests<br>• Leadership skills |
| **Purdue University** | | ☑ | • Grade in core courses<br>• Grades in courses related to intended major<br>• Class rank (if provided)<br>• Strength of curriculum<br>• Application essay<br>• Recommendation<br>• Evidence of leadership, service, awards |

## Using Different GPA Scales Does Not Negatively Impact Students' Likelihood of Receiving Merit-Based Scholarships

Contacts at Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, Michigan Technological University, Northern Michigan University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan University state that scholarship decision-makers evaluate GPA on a 4.0 scale. Thus, contacts at these six profiled institutions report that variance in GPA scale (e.g., 5.0, 11.0) does not disadvantage students in the scholarship allocation process.

Regarding school-provided GPAs on a 4.0 scale that are higher than 4.0 (e.g., weighted GPA of 4.2 on a 4.0 scale), contacts at Michigan Technological University report that scholarship decision-makers cap GPA at 4.0. Similarly, at Central Michigan University, scholarship decision-makers consider GPAs higher than 4.0 as 4.0.

Contacts at Purdue University state that scholarship decision-makers do not prioritize GPA in their review of applicants.

## Most Profiled Institutions Do Not Consider GPA in Need-Based Financial Aid Decisions

Most profiled institutions do not consider applicant GPA when allocating need-based financial aid. For example, contacts at Michigan State University note that the financial aid office allocates need-based institutional aid based on eligibility determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)). Contacts at Western Michigan University note that financial aid officers may consider GPA when assigning need-based financial aid only in the unique case of limited institutional aid.

# 3) Class Rank

## Impact on Admissions

### High Schools Are Increasingly Eliminating Class Rank

Contacts at most profiled institutions and college admissions officers across the U.S. acknowledge the significant decrease in the number of applicants who come from high schools that rank students.[1] The 2018 State of College Admission report, issued by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, found that 63 percent of admissions officers (of 172 admissions officers) cited class rank as having "limited" or "no" importance in the admissions process.[2] David Hawkins, Executive Director of Educational Content and Policy at the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, notes that class rank is not a direct measure of student achievement, given inconsistency in rigor and grading scales among different schools.[3] Thus, class rank is not a robust metric of student achievement.

Because class rank may drive students to take an overload of advanced courses to boost their GPAs, ranking students can cause student stress.[4] In response, some high school administrators have implemented alternatives to traditionally ranking students,[5] while other high school administrators have chosen to discontinue the practice of ranking students. Contacts at Michigan State University note that admissions officers anticipate even more high schools will choose to move away from class rank in the future.

**Alternatives to Traditionally Ranking Students at High Schools Across the U.S.[6]**

1

**Release Limited Class Rank Information to Students**

School administrators rank students internally and publicly release only the names of students ranked first and second at the end of senior year, to designate the valedictorian and salutatorian.

2

**Withhold Class Rank from Students**

School administrators release class rank only when students need this metric for scholarship applications. In these cases, school administrators send the information in a sealed envelope directly to university administrators.

3

**Allow Multiple Students to Share Top Rank**

All students who achieve a weighted GPA above 4.0 share the designation of valedictorian.

In response to the decreasing trend of schools providing class rank, contacts at Michigan Technological University report that administrators eliminated class rank from the admissions process in the last ten years. Contacts report that today, most students who apply to Michigan Technological University do not provide class rank.

1) Balingit, Moriah. "High Schools Are Doing Away with Class Rank. What Does That Mean For College Admissions?" The Washington Post, 2015. Accessed September 23, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/07/13/high-schools-are-doing-away-with-class-rank-what-does-that-mean-for-college-admissions/.
2) "Class Rank, GPA, and Grading." National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2019. Accessed September 23, 2019. https://www.nassp.org/policy-advocacy-center/nassp-position-statements/class-rank-gpa-and-grading/; "2018 State of College Admission." National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2018. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/2018_soca/soca18.pdf.
3) Balingit, Moriah. "High Schools Are Doing Away with Class Rank. What Does That Mean For College Admissions?" The Washington Post, 2015. Accessed September 23, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/07/13/high-schools-are-doing-away-with-class-rank-what-does-that-mean-for-college-admissions/.
4) Ibid.
5) Ibid.
6) Ibid.

## Eliminating Class Rank Does Not Disadvantage Students in the Admissions Process at Profiled Institutions

Contacts at Michigan Technological University and Northern Michigan University report that admissions officers do not consider class rank, even when provided. Contacts at Northern Michigan University additionally note that internal research on predictive factors of success at the university did not find class rank to be a significant factor.

Contacts at Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, Purdue University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan University report that admissions officers may note class rank, when provided. However, contacts at these five profiled institutions emphasize that admissions officers do not mandate or prioritize class rank during the admissions process.

Because profiled institutions either do not consider or deprioritize class rank as an indicator in admissions, contacts at all profiled institutions report that eliminating class rank does not negatively impact applicants' likelihood of admissions.

## Admissions Officers at Some Profiled Institutions May Use Class Rank to Gain Additional Context on Academic Achievement

Contacts at Central Michigan University, Michigan State University, Purdue University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan University present the below circumstances in which admissions officers may consider class rank, if provided, as an additional data point in the admissions process.

### Examples of Noting Class Rank at Profiled Institutions

**Holistic Review for Borderline Students**

- Contacts at Central Michigan University and Western Michigan University explain that admissions officers review borderline applicants more holistically (i.e., consider additional aspects of their application), which may include class rank (if provided) along with other factors such as course rigor and letters of recommendation.
- For example, contacts at Western Michigan University explain that a student from one school with a 3.2 GPA could be the valedictorian, whereas a student from another school with the same GPA could be in the bottom 10 percent of their class. Class rank, in this instance, could offer valuable context for borderline students' academic achievement.

**Contextualization of Academic Achievements Within School**

- Contacts at Michigan State University and Purdue University state that class rank can help admissions officers better understand students' academic achievement (i.e., how students compare with their peers) in their respective school environments.
- Contacts at the University of Michigan report that admissions officers primarily review class rank when students are coming from schools that are not as well-known to the admissions team. In these circumstances, class rank informs admissions officers how a student compares with the rest of their class.

## Eliminating Class Rank Does Not Disadvantage Students' Likelihood of Receiving Scholarships at Most Profiled Institutions

Contacts at all profiled institutions emphasize that scholarship decision-makers do not prioritize class rank when allocating scholarships. Notably, contacts at Central Michigan University and Purdue University report that scholarship decision-makers may review class rank, when provided—but only as an additional data point to better understand students' academic achievements.

### Role of Class Rank in Scholarship Allocation Processes at Profiled Institutions

**Do Not Consider Class Rank**

- Contacts at Michigan State University, Michigan Technological University, Northern Michigan University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan report that scholarship decision-makers do not consider class rank.
- At the University of Michigan, contacts note that one merit-based scholarship reviews applicants' percentile rank. However, percentile rank is based on the university's recalculated GPAs instead of class rank.

**May Consider Class Rank if Provided**

- At Central Michigan University, eliminating class rank may, in rare instances, disadvantage students considered for some application-based scholarships. For these application-based scholarships, contacts report that scholarship decision-makers review students holistically (i.e., consider data points beyond GPA), which may include class rank.
- Contacts at Purdue University state that because scholarship decision-makers do not mandate class rank, they do not use class rank as a determining factor for allocating scholarships. However, contacts note that reviewers may consider class rank if provided.

#### Michigan Technological University Eliminated Class Rank from Scholarship Consideration Process in 2018

Previously, scholarship decision-makers at Michigan Technological University used a 300-point index assigned to each student and gave equal weight to GPA, standardized test scores, and class rank. The institution awarded merit-based scholarships in different tiers based on students' score on the index. As a response to high schools increasingly eliminating class rank, scholarship decision-makers decided to reconfigure the index to completely remove class rank from scholarship considerations. Today, scholarship decision-makers only consider GPA and standardized test scores, with greater weight assigned to GPA.

# 4) Advanced Coursework

## Impact on Admissions

### Advanced Courses Impact Admissions Processes at Profiled Institutions That Assess Rigor of Curriculum

At all seven profiled institutions, admissions officers view AP and IB courses as equally rigorous.

Admissions officers at Purdue University, Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, and Western Michigan University evaluate the rigor of courses that students select within the context of their high school offerings. Because admissions officers at Michigan State University and Western Michigan University add additional weight for advanced courses to recalculated GPAs, students who take advanced courses and perform well receive a higher recalculated GPA.

Contacts at multiple profiled institutions emphasize that AP and IB courses provide strong preparation for the rigor of college courses, particularly in students' intended field of study. For example, contacts at Purdue University cite statewide research that reports that students who take two or more AP courses in Indiana are more likely to enroll in college and less likely to need academic remediation.[7]

### Advanced Courses Do Not Impact Admissions Processes at Profiled Institutions that Prioritize GPA as the Primary Indicator of Student Achievement

Admissions officers at Central Michigan University, Michigan Technological University, and Northern Michigan University prioritize final course grades, such as GPA, over course rigor. Therefore, admissions officers at these three profiled institutions do not review advanced courses as part of the admissions process.

At Michigan Technological University, contacts note that admissions officers do not know if schools limit advanced courses (i.e., do not review school profiles to that level of depth).

For example, contacts at Central Michigan University and Michigan Technological University explain that if two students both achieved a 4.0 GPA, but one student took advanced courses and the other did not, admissions officers would consider the two students similarly (given identical overall grade trends and standardized test scores). In addition, contacts at Michigan Technological University note that admissions officers do not distinguish between students who take a few IB courses and those who complete the full IB diploma. Similarly, at Northern Michigan University, admissions officers do not consider advanced courses in their review of GPA and standardized test scores.

Only for borderline students do admissions officers at Central Michigan University and Northern Michigan University conduct a holistic review and potentially consider the number of advanced courses as a measure of curriculum rigor for these students. However, contacts at Central Michigan University report that if students take any AP and/or IB courses, they typically perform well enough to gain admission and therefore do not trigger holistic review.

7) "College Readiness Report 2019." Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2019. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.in.gov/che/files/2019_College_Readiness_Report_04-03-19-Final.pdf.

## Advanced Course Limits Do Not Disadvantage Applicants in the Admissions Process at Profiled Institutions

Admissions officers evaluate applicants within the context of their schools' policies and the courses available to them. Thus, contacts at all profiled institutions report establishing a limit on the number of advanced courses students may take per year or over several years does not disadvantage applicants' likelihood of admission.

Contacts at all profiled institutions responded positively to school administrators' primary motivation behind limiting advanced courses: mitigating student stress. According to Pew Research Center, 70 percent of teenagers report anxiety and depression as a "major problem" among their peers, a problem that cuts across gender, socio-economic, and racial lines.[8] The American Psychiatric Association reports that almost half of mental illness cases begin by age 14.[9] Contacts at multiple profiled institutions reference the rising number of students with mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression, on their respective campuses.

Contacts at profiled institutions recommend several student course load considerations for high school administrators considering limiting advanced courses.

8) Horowitz Juliana Menasce; N Graf. "Most U.S. Teens See Anxiety and Depression as a Major Problem Among Their Peers." Pew Research Center, 2019. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/.
9) Snow, Kate, C McFadden. "Generation at Risk: America's Youngest Facing Mental Health Crisis." NBC News, 2017. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.nbcnews.com/health/kids-health/generation-risk-america-s-youngest-facing-mental-health-crisis-n827836.

## Recommendations for Student Course Load by Profiled Institutions

For more information on supporting students in advanced courses, review **pages 54-62** of EAB's study **Closing the College Access Gap**.

### If implementing an advanced course limit, help students choose the most relevant advanced course load.

- Contacts at Purdue University recommend that school administrators and teachers help students prioritize the most relevant courses based on students' goals (e.g., related to interests, intended major).
- For example, if a student is interested in pursuing the natural sciences (e.g., biology, physics) at Purdue University, admissions officers would consider AP calculus, chemistry, and physics as stronger preparation for the major than AP history, English, and foreign language.

### If implementing an advanced course limit, consider reassessing the policy every few years to measure its outcomes.

- Contacts at Purdue University suggest that school administrators reach out to alumni to explore the relationship between number of advanced courses taken in high school and academic achievement in college.
- In addition, school administrators should ensure that the advanced course limit leads to its intended impact of decreasing student stress.

### Encourage students to balance challenge (i.e., rigor of curriculum) and capacity to ensure sustained academic achievement.

- Contacts at Michigan State University and Western Michigan University encourage students to take on a course load they can handle. For example, contacts at Michigan State University note that admissions officers view students who perform well in a few IB courses more favorably than students who perform poorly in the full IB curriculum.
- Contacts at Western Michigan University recommend that students, families, and school counselors work closely together to determine an appropriately challenging yet sustainable course load.
- A report by the Harvard Graduate School of Education states that "simply taking large numbers of AP or IB courses per year is often not as valuable as sustained achievement in a limited number of areas."[10]

### Correct misconceptions on how advanced courses translate to college credit.

- Contacts at Michigan Technological University recommend school administrators clarify to students that AP credits do not allow students to completely skip introductory college courses and graduate in under four years. Institutions of higher education are moving away from automatically granting course promotion (to upper-level courses) based on AP scores.[11]

### Remind students and families that out-of-school factors are also important in the admissions process at some institutions.

- For example, contacts at Northern Michigan University emphasize the importance of balancing academic achievement with involvement in extracurriculars and community activities.

10) "Turning the Tide: Inspiring Concern for Others and the Common Good Through College Admissions." Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2016. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/turning-the-tide-college-admissions.
11) "Limiting the Number of AP Classes Students Can Take." Unlocking Time. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.unlockingtime.org/time-strategies-for-schools/limit-the-number-of-AP-classes-students-can-take.

## If Implementing an Advanced Course Limit, Avoid Allowing Exceptions to Improve Equity

Students who adhere to the advanced course limit may experience disadvantages in the admissions process if peers from the same school are allowed to exceed the limit and take a more rigorous course load (i.e., earn a higher weighted GPA).[12] In addition, if school administrators allow exceptions to the advanced course limit, they may unintentionally introduce bias in access to AP and IB courses.

**3x**

Greater likelihood that middle- and high-income students enroll in an AP course, compared to their low-income peers.[13]

Research demonstrates that although overall AP and IB enrollment numbers have increased over time, black, Hispanic, and low-income students are consistently underrepresented in AP and IB courses (i.e., compared to their white, Asian, and middle-class peers).[14] In an analysis of 2012 data, the College Board reported that two-thirds to nearly three-quarters of black and Hispanic students who achieved PSAT scores that suggest their ability to be successful in AP science or math courses did not enroll in these programs.[15]

Research also shows a strong positive correlation between a comprehensive, rigorous course of study in high school and college success.[16] Thus, gaps in advanced course enrollment between black, Hispanic, and low-income students and their peers contribute to gaps in respective college-going rates.

By requiring all students to adhere to the advanced course limit, school administrators avoid potential disparities in granting exceptions to that limit (e.g., granting exceptions to students who traditionally enroll in AP and IB courses at a higher frequency). Thus, school administrators facilitate more equal access to AP and IB courses.

## No Profiled Institutions Recommend an Optimal Number of Advanced Courses

Contacts at Michigan State University and Michigan Technological University emphasize that the decision to limit advanced courses should be made by school administrators as they determine the appropriate course load for their students.

Contacts at Michigan State University state that a limit of five to six advanced courses would be consistent with the applicants that admissions officers review. Contacts report that the average student who applies to Michigan State University takes between two and five AP or IB courses.

Contacts at the University of Michigan cite a 2013 study by the University of North Carolina (UNC)-Chapel Hill, which found that students who take a greater number of AP or IB courses do perform better (i.e., earn higher GPAs) in their first year at UNC—but this effect plateaus after five AP or IB courses.[17]

12) EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com).
13) Theokas, Christina, R Saaris. "Finding America's Missing AP and IB Students" (page 4). The Education Trust, 2013. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Missing_Students.pdf.
14) Ibid.
15) Theokas, Christina, R Saaris. "Finding America's Missing AP and IB Students" (pages 6-7). The Education Trust, 2013. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Missing_Students.pdf.
16) Adelman, Cliff. "Answers in the Toolbox: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment." U.S. Department of Education, 1999. Accessed September 30, 2019. https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox/toolbox.html.
17) Hardy, Susan. "More AP Classes May Not Be Better." University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2013. Accessed September 24, 2019. http://endeavors.unc.edu/more_ap_classes_may_not_be_better; "How Much is Enough?" Journal of College Admission, 2013. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1011884.pdf.

# 5) Communicating Policy Changes

## Communication Channels

### Inform Admissions Officers of Any Policy Changes to Avoid Disadvantaging Students in the Admissions Process

Contacts at multiple profiled institutions emphasize the importance of clearly communicating any changes in grading, class rank, and advanced course opportunities.

For additional insights from other midsize and large institutions of higher education, review EAB's related brief **The Impacts of School-Provided GPA and Advanced Course Limits on Admissions Decisions**.

**Channels of Communication of Policy Changes**

Reach out directly (e.g., call, email) to regional admissions counselor.

Communicate changes in secondary school report.

Communicate changes in school profile (e.g., attached to the transcript).

When school administrators inform admissions officers of advanced course limits, admissions officers can better understand the opportunities available to a student and contextualize their academic achievement. This is especially important for institutions such as Michigan State University, Purdue University, and the University of Michigan that consider rigor of curriculum as part of their assessment of applicant academic achievement.

Contacts at Purdue University raise an example of a student who takes advanced courses earlier on in high school and reaches the limit for advanced courses by their senior year. In this case, it would be helpful for admissions officers to know the context of an advanced course limit so that they do not assume that this student took a less challenging course load during their senior year by choice.

**Provide Information on Available Curriculum in the School Profile, Especially to Institutions that Holistically Review Applicants**

Contacts at the University of Michigan strongly recommend that high school administrators clearly explain their available curriculum on the school profile. School administrators should communicate any limitations on advanced courses, measure of student achievement in courses, and average standardized test scores (i.e., SAT, ACT) for the school. In addition, contacts recommend providing information on the highest achieving group of students (e.g., top 10 percent), such as average standardized test scores and grade distribution. Contacts note that this level of detail in the school profile is most helpful if an institution (such as the University of Michigan) uses a holistic review process.

# 6) Research Methodology

## Project Challenges

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What role do GPAs and class rank have on admissions decisions at contact institutions?
- How do contact institutions consider varying methods that high schools use to weight GPAs for admissions decisions?
- Do high schools that eliminate class rank negatively impact students' chances of admission at contact institutions?
- Do contact institutions recalculate transcripts for high schools that use weighted GPAs? If so, how?
- To contacts' knowledge, how does class rank impact students' financial aid package at contact institutions?
  - How do financial aid decision makers at contact institutions take into consideration GPAs above 4.0?
- What recommendations do contact institutions have for high schools considering eliminating class rank?
- What role do advanced courses (i.e., AP, IB) have on admissions decisions at contact institutions?
- Do contact institutions view AP and IB equally? If not, please explain.
- Do contact institutions recommend an optimal number of AP/IB courses students should take?
- How do contact institutions take into consideration high schools that limit the number of AP/IB courses that students can take when reviewing applications?
- Do high schools that limit AP/IB course enrollment negatively impact students' chances of admission at contact institutions?
- What recommendations do contact institutions have for high schools considering limiting the number of AP/IB courses students can take?

## Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:


- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com).
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/).
- Undergraduate Admissions, Financial Aid, and Scholarships websites of profiled institutions.
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## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed admissions staff at midsize and large institutions of higher education in the Midwest.

### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

| Institution | State | Approximate Undergraduate Enrollment | Undergraduate Acceptance Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Central Michigan University** | MI | 16,400 | 72% |
| **Michigan State University** | MI | 39,400 | 66% |
| **Michigan Technological University** | MI | 5,800 | 76% |
| **Northern Michigan University** | MI | 7,000 | 76% |
| **Purdue University** | IN | 30,800 | 58% |
| **University of Michigan** | MI | 30,300 | 29% |
| **Western Michigan University** | MI | 17,800 | 82% |

# 7) Networking Contacts

**Central Michigan University**

Lee Furbeck

*Executive Director of Admissions*

Furbe1l@cmich.edu

(989) 774-3872

**Michigan State University**

John Ambrose

*Interim Executive Director of Admissions and Recruitment*

Ambros28@msu.edu

(517) 355-8332

**Michigan Technological University**

Allison Carter

*Director of Admissions*

Aagranik@mtu.edu

(888) 688-1885

**Northern Michigan University**

Gerri Daniels

*Executive Director of Admissions*

Gdaniels@nmu.edu

(906) 227-1464

**Purdue University**

Ja'Niah Downing

*Associate Director of Admissions*

Downingj@purdue.edu

(765) 496-3408

**University of Michigan**

Erica Sanders

*Director of Undergraduate Admissions*

Uadirector@umich.edu

(734) 647-0104

**Western Michigan University**

Alicia Kornowa

*Director of Admissions*

Alicia.kornowa@wmich.edu

(269) 387-2046

EAB

# A/B Block Schedules for High Schools

District Leadership Forum

# District Leadership Forum

**Madelyn Bowers**
*Research Associate*

**Olivia Rios**
*Senior Research Manager*

# Table of Contents

# 1) Executive Overview

## Key Observations

**Administrators at profiled schools implement a block schedule to provide increased flexibility for students, better prepare them for college, and ease their course load-related stress.** Contacts at all five profiled schools emphasize that the block schedule model allows students to take more courses throughout their four-year high school career. Contacts report lower levels of student stress and increased preparedness for college or careers.

**Administrators at profiled schools often operate a modified version of the A/B block schedule to accommodate the time requirements of different courses.** Four of five profiled schools administer a modified version of an A/B block schedule. Variations of the A/B block schedule at profiled schools include a hybrid model (i.e., some combination of A/B model and 4x4 model), A/B alternating with rotating Fridays, and a blended block (i.e., both 90-minute periods and 45-minute periods).

**Administrators often create new courses or implement new curricula after they implement a block schedule model.** With longer class times and additional credit accumulation, block schedules can open avenues for innovation in high school curricula. The block schedule model allowed administrators at **School D** to implement an integrated math curriculum, and administrators at **School B** created courses focused on social and emotional learning to support student success.

**Contacts at profiled schools emphasize that the block schedule model allows teachers to employ more interactive and project-based learning strategies in the classroom**. Interactive classroom strategies include Socratic discussions, hands-on labs, and real-world problem solving. Block schedule models provide teachers with time to include active learning activities in addition to direct instruction to better engage students and deepen learning.

**Provide collaborative professional development sessions before the initial implementation of a block schedule to help teachers adapt to increased class time.** These sessions focus on how to develop transitions during a longer lesson and how to engage students in project-based learning activities. Administrators invite teachers and departments from nearby schools to help train teachers in subject-specific teaching strategies and to help align curricula to the block schedule. After the initial implementation, academic departments administer these professional development sessions independently.

# 2) A/B Block Schedule Motivations and Structures

Motivations

## Block Schedules Can Increase Course Capacity, Mitigate Student Stress, and Prepare Students for College

Administrators at profiled schools cite increased course capacity for students, decreased student stress, and increased college preparation as the three main motivations for implementing a block schedule.

### Motivations for Implementing a Block Schedule at Profiled Schools

#### Increase Course Capacity for Students

Contacts at all five profiled schools note that the block schedule model allows students to take more courses throughout high school. Because students can accrue more credits in a block schedule versus a traditional schedule, students have more flexibility in course selection and can more easily make up courses should they perform poorly.

Also, in a block schedule, students have more time to:

- Participate in jobs or internships during the school day
- Have free periods or study halls
- Explore interests in sports, performing arts, and other electives

#### Mitigate Student Stress

Administrators at **School D** implemented a block schedule largely due to an increase in student stress related to coursework and homework. Prior to the transition to a block schedule, students balanced six courses worth of homework daily on top of extracurricular activities, which proved overwhelming for many students. According to administrators, students do not report as much stress within the block schedule model as they did within the traditional schedule model.

#### Prepare Students for College

Contacts at **School B** believe the block schedule model better prepares their students for the typical college course schedule, where courses meet in large blocks of time and do not typically meet daily. The longer class periods coupled with increased flexibility in course selection make a block schedule model like the typical college schedule.

## Modify the A/B Block Schedule to Accommodate Course Needs

Administrators at profiled schools often operate a modified version of the A/B block schedule to accommodate the time requirements of different courses. All profiled schools except **School E** administer a modified version of an A/B block schedule. At School E, all courses offered fit into the A/B block format.

### Three Types of A/B Block Schedule Modification at Profiled Schools

**Hybrid Model**

Administrators at **School A** and **School D** integrate the 4x4 block schedule model (i.e., students enroll in four courses per semester for two semesters) with the A/B schedule.

- Ninth and tenth grade students typically take courses that operate on the 4x4 schedule. This schedule helps students acclimate to high school courses, since they only take four courses at a time (instead of the six or seven taken by students in upper grades).
- Administrators offer rigorous courses with spring evaluations on an A/B schedule. Because students study the course materials throughout the year, they are therefore better prepared for the spring exams. Students at the eleventh and twelfth grade level often enroll in more rigorous courses (e.g., AP courses) so tend to follow a more traditional A/B schedule.

**Standard A/B Model with Alternating Fridays**

Administrators at **School B** operate a traditional A/B block schedule with alternating Fridays to meet the state-mandated minimum number of instructional minutes for career and technology courses.

- Mondays through Thursdays are alternating A/B days, while Fridays alternate between "A" days and "B "days from week-to-week.
- Administrators occasionally repeat a week to meet the state's minimum number of instructional minutes for career and technology courses.

**Blended Model**

Administrators at **School C** offer a blended A/B block schedule broken into eight, 45-minute periods, called "skinny" courses, to increase course scheduling flexibility and maximize teachers' instructional time.

- Administrators offer courses either as 90-minute block courses or 45-minute "skinny" courses. All types of courses are offered as skinny periods depending on the needs of students.
- Skinny courses alleviate course capacity issues as administrators can offer bottleneck courses, such as algebra and introductory English, in a variety of block and skinny periods.

## Examples of A/B Block Schedule Modifications at Profiled Schools

| Example Hybrid Model Schedule | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Semester One | | Semester Two | |
| Block | A | B | A | B |
| One | AP World History | AP English | AP World History | AP English |
| Two | Spanish III | Spanish III | Art | Music Theory |
| Three | Calculus | Calculus | Chemistry | Chemistry |
| Four | Performing Arts | Study Hall | Performing Arts | Study Hall |

| Example Alternating Friday Schedule | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
| Week One | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A |
| Week Two | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule B |
| Week Three | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A |
| Week Four | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A | Schedule B | Schedule A |

| Example Blended Block Model | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Block | | A | B |
| One | Skinny (45 minutes) | English | Math |
| | Skinny (45 minutes) | English Support | Math Support |
| Two | Two (90 minutes) | Chemistry | World History |
| Three | Three (90 minutes) | Web Development | Programming 1 |
| Four | Four Skinny (45 minutes) | Spanish | Spanish |
| | Four Skinny (45 minutes) | Gym | Gym |

Additional Schedule Considerations

## Build in Time for Students to Access Additional Support During the School Day

Administrators at **School C**, **School D**, and **School E** incorporate additional support time into students' schedules. These advisory periods allow students to receive personal and/or academic support.

Administrators at School C offer academic support to students during a "skinny" period. For example, if a student needs extra support in English beyond the normal class period, administrators will place the student in a 45-minute academic support course. Students who perform poorly on state-wide assessment also receive additional academic support in the form of a "skinny" period.

Administrators at School D include a ten-minute advisory period for students three days a week. Students meet with an assigned advisor to discuss personal, social, and academic issues. The advisory period serves as an important time for advisors to more deeply understand their advisees' lives and school experiences beyond the classroom.

### Advisory at *School D*

Students attend advisory period for **ten minutes** between periods one and two on **Monday**, **Thursday**, and **Friday**.

Students are **assigned an advisor** when they begin high school and **remain with the same advisor** until graduation.

**Teachers serve as advisors** and oversee small groups of students.

Students at School E receive one 35-minute period of flexible time every day. Students can access administrative offices, the library, the quad (i.e., the open common area near the office), and teachers' offices during this time. This period takes place between the first and second periods of the day.

#### *School E* Uses Formal Tutorial Center During Built-in Academic Support Time

The Tutorial Center at **School E** is a student-run, academic support center. Located in the library, the Tutorial Center is designed for collaborative and interactive academic support. Students can access the Tutorial Center to receive tutoring from peer tutors during their flexible 35-minute period or during study hall periods. One dedicated staff member manages the Tutorial Center space, creates tutoring schedules, and trains peer tutors. The Tutorial Center has proven to be an effective way to provide additional academic support to students beyond the support teachers provide during classroom time.

Contacts at School B want to build in an advisory period for their students but cannot do so because they must adhere to the state's minimum instructional minutes for career and technology courses. Contacts do note, however, that pull-out advising (i.e., students are pulled out from class to receive academic support) is easier in a block schedule because students do not miss entire classes to receive support. Students may miss a portion of the class, but longer class periods enable them to make up missed work within the standard class period.

## Stagger Lunch Periods to Reduce Strain on Cafeteria Space

Administrators at **School A**, **School B,** and **School C** offer staggered lunches during the third instructional period of the day. Administrators extend this period by 30 to 60 minutes to accommodate lunch scheduling. Beyond food service staff, contacts do not note any impact to non-instructional staff due to a block schedule model.

When creating the course schedule each year, administrators at School A ask all teachers when they would like lunch to take place during the third period. While most teachers opt for lunch before or after instructional time, a few teachers opt for lunch in the middle of instructional time to offer their students a break from the material. The first and third lunches are full while the second lunch is much smaller, which reduces distracting transition noise in the hallways while other students are in the middle of classes.

### Examples of Staggered Lunches

| **Two Staggered Lunches** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Periods 1, 2,** and **4** are **92 minutes** | | | |
| **Period 3** is **148 minutes** (12:10pm – 2:38pm) | Lunch One | Lunch<br>Class | 12:10pm – 12:59pm<br>1:04 pm – 2:38pm |
| | Lunch Two | Class<br>Lunch<br>Class | 12:15pm – 1:04pm<br>1:04pm – 1:49pm<br>1:54pm – 2:38pm |

| **Three Staggered Lunches** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Periods 1, 2,** and **4** are **90 minutes** | | | |
| **Period 3** is **125 minutes** (11:10am – 1:15pm) | Lunch One | Lunch<br>Class | 11:10am – 11:40am<br>11:45am – 1:15pm |
| | Lunch Two | Class<br>Lunch<br>Class | 11:15am – 12:00pm<br>12:00pm – 12:30pm<br>12:35pm – 1:15pm |
| | Lunch Three | Class<br>Lunch | 11:15am – 12:45pm<br>12:45pm – 1:15pm |

**Examples of Staggered Lunches (cont.)**

| Four Staggered Lunches | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Periods 1, 2,** and **4** are **94 minutes** | | | |
| **Period 3** is **120 minutes** (10:43am – 12:43pm) | Lunch One | Lunch | 10:43am – 11:13am |
| | | Class | 11:13am – 12:43pm |
| | Lunch Two | Class | 10:43am – 11:13am |
| | | Lunch | 11:13am – 11:43pm |
| | | Class | 11:43am – 12:43pm |
| | Lunch Three | Class | 10:43am – 11:43am |
| | | Lunch | 11:43am – 12:13pm |
| | | Class | 12:13pm – 12:43pm |
| | Lunch Four | Class | 10:43am – 12:13pm |
| | | Lunch | 12:13pm – 12:43pm |

## Consider Allowing Students to Leave Campus during Lunch to Reduce Lunchtime Pressure

For more information on open campus lunch policies, please see EAB's report **High School Open Campus Lunch Policies**.

Administrators at **School B** offer two lunches to students. Administrators considered adding a third lunch period due to the recent dramatic increase in student population but opted instead to offer senior students the opportunity to leave campus during lunch. Contacts note that enough seniors leave campus to reduce pressure of the food service staff and cafeteria space. Contacts also pointed out that that off-campus obligations, like career preparation, internships, jobs, and college courses, also reduce the lunchtime strain.

## Block Schedules Provide Additional Planning Time for Teachers

At most profiled schools, teachers saw their planning time double compared to a traditional schedule. This increased planning time was a key factor to gaining buy-in from teachers during initial block schedule implementation.

Teachers at **School A**, **School B**, and **School D** receive one entire block for planning (e.g., 90 minutes) every day. Teachers at these schools instruct three of four block periods daily, or six of eight periods, throughout the year.

Teachers at **School C** receive approximately 45 minutes daily for planning time. Teachers typically instruct six block periods and one skinny period throughout the year.

Teachers at **School E** officially receive 90 minutes of planning every other day. Teachers instruct five of seven courses throughout the year, and the remaining two periods are provided as a planning period and an "unassigned" period. Contacts note that many teachers use their unassigned period as another planning period, though they are not obligated to spend this time planning. Teachers can meet with other teachers, spend time on personal development, or enjoy a peaceful meal.

## Integrate Collaboration Time for Teachers Before or During the School Day

Administrators at **School C**, **School D**, and **School E** provide collaborative time for teachers on a daily or weekly basis. Contacts report that collaborative time is most effective before or during the school day, when teachers have few external, conflicting commitments.

### Three Methods to Provide Collaborative Planning Time for Teachers

#### Before School with a Late Start Schedule

Administrators at **School D** have implemented Monday late-starts in their bell schedule for collaborative teacher planning time.

- Every Monday, departments meet from 8:00am – 9:00am to discuss subject-specific instructional strategies, curriculum, and general updates.
- Occasionally, these Monday late-starts serve as school-wide meetings to solve larger problems involving all teachers and administrators.
- To accommodate this collaborative time, administrators reduce class periods 15 minutes each on Mondays.

#### After School

Administrators at **School E** implement after-school collaborative time for teachers once per week.

- Departments independently offer trainings and discussions, and sometimes staff-wide meetings take place during this collaborative time.
- Contacts note that after-school collaborative time is not as effective as before-school time, as staff members frequently have conflicting commitments during the afternoon collaborative sessions.
- Administrators may consider transitioning to morning collaborative time and implementing a late-start schedule.

#### Reserved Periods in School Day During Curriculum Transitions

Administrators at **School C** provide collaborative time for departments that recently switched curriculum or textbooks. Administrators only offer this collaborative time during a curriculum transition. While beneficial for staff, scheduling this collaborative time for departments proves challenging for administrators given the variability of their course schedules.

- Teachers instructing Algebra 1 and Geometry recently implemented a new curriculum and textbook. Administrators gave these teachers two skinny periods (one block period) daily all year to collaborate on classroom and lesson strategies for this new curriculum.
- One skinny period (i.e., half of this collaborative block) is "unstructured" collaborative time, where teachers can discuss the new curriculum and new teaching strategies together. An assistant principal joins the other skinny period and provides administrative oversight.
- Because no students can be scheduled for these courses during the planning period, other classes accommodate many more students during this period than other periods.

## Consider Creating Professional Learning Communities to Promote School-Wide Collaboration

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are collaborative teams of teachers focused on improving student learning with reflective self-evaluation of instructional strategies and continuous learning. PLCs serve as advocates for student-focused classroom strategies and continuous improvement of instruction and curriculum.

### Three Big Ideas of PLCs[1]


**1: Ensure Students Learn**

A PLC holds responsibility for maximizing student learning. As a group, teachers identify what each student should learn, how teachers will know if a student has met expectations, and how teachers should respond if students have trouble learning.

**2: Build a Culture of Collaboration**

A PLC should promote a collaborative culture. Teachers work as a team to analyze and improve their classroom practices. The team engages in discussions focused on teaching goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and student results.

**3: Focus on Results**

PLCs judge their effectiveness based on student results. Instead of simply collecting data, teachers work as a group to analyze and compare data on student learning.

District administrators at **School D** created and supported PLCs when the school first made the transition to a block schedule. The district invited external speakers to educate all teachers in the School About the PLC model and the importance of collaboration to promote student success.

### PLCs at *School D*

PLCs advocate for adjustments to curriculum and instruction based on student achievement to promote continuous improvement and learning across the school.

PLCs enable teachers to bring interesting classroom strategies to PLC meetings, discuss them with colleagues, and then implement the new strategies in the classroom. Teachers then report back to the larger group to discuss how students reacted to the new strategies.

1) Richard DuFour. "What is a "Professional Learning Community"." Educational Leadership (May 2004) pgs. 6-11 http://www.allthingsplc.info/files/uploads/DuFourWhatIsAProfessionalLearningCommunity.pdf

# 4) Block Schedule Implementation

## Collecting Feedback

### Continuously Seek and Collect Feedback from Teachers and Students

Communicating frequently and clearly with teachers about the block schedule transition is key to garnering wide-spread support for the initial change. Administrators should collect feedback from teachers throughout the initial implementation process. After block schedule implementation, administrators should routinely check in with teachers and students to identify potential future schedule adjustments.

Prior to the 2018-2019 school year, administrators at **School A** operated a standard A/B schedule. The standard model made scheduling courses difficult for administrators, and courses like math and world languages were not suited for the alternating-day schedule. Administrators changed the format of various courses on an ad-hoc basis, which made tracking course schedule adjustments tedious. Around 2015, administrators began considering schedule model alterations to better serve their students.

#### Process to Adapt Block Schedule at *School A*

1. Administrators interviewed teachers from each department to field suggestions for schedule model improvements.
2. Instructional staff in each department created their ideal course schedules.
3. Administrators incorporated each department's suggestions to create a master schedule that they determined best supported student learning.

The new hybrid model better suits the needs of students, teachers, and courses. Administrators at School A have more flexibility and offer courses daily for one semester (e.g., world languages), every other day for one semester (e.g., art), or every other day for the whole year (e.g., AP science) depending on the needs of students and the course. Though challenging, contacts note that the comprehensive and collaborative review of their standard block schedule helped garner teacher support for implementing a blended block schedule.

Administrators at **School B** and **School E** initially offered standard A/B block schedules four days a week with a traditional schedule on the remaining day each week. Contacts received feedback that teachers did not enjoy re-calibrating their lessons for the shorter periods one day per week, and students reported high levels of stress due to the need to meet homework requirements for all eight courses once each week. Administrators at both schools decided to eliminate the traditional schedule day to alleviate student and teacher stress related to coursework.

Administrators at **School D** have not adjusted their block schedule model after implementation but continue to adjust course offerings to accommodate teacher and student needs. For example, administrators initially offered world language courses on the standard A/B schedule. Teachers expressed the need for students to engage in daily practice to best engage with the foreign language, so administrators switched foreign languages to a daily course offered each semester.  As another example,

math courses used to be offered in a solid block (i.e., daily block period for one semester) model. Students who took math during the fall semester reported feeling unprepared for the spring state standardized test, so administrators changed math courses to the standard A/B schedule.

## Changes to Instruction

### Block Schedules Facilitate Innovations in Curriculum and Course Offerings

With longer class times and additional credit accumulation, block schedules facilitate innovation in high school curricula. Contacts at **School D** say that the block schedule model allows them to experiment in all aspects of their curriculum. Block periods slow down learning to focus on intentional lessons with interactive applications of new knowledge. The block schedule encourages teachers to try new classroom management and instructional strategies because they have longer class periods in which to experiment.

**Block Schedule Allowed *School D* to Implement an Integrated Math Curriculum**

Administrators at **School D** changed their math curriculum from isolated math (i.e., separate courses for Geometry, Algebra, Calculus, etc.) to integrated math (i.e., one course that explores multiple math topics) due in part to increased class time in a block schedule. Administrators implemented this new math curriculum and adjusted classroom strategies periodically without feeling pressured to get it right the first time.

Because students have more flexibility in their course selection in a block schedule than in a traditional schedule and a block schedule aligns more closely with a typical college schedule, administrators at **School B** introduced social and emotional learning courses in this model to help students prepare for life after graduation. Examples of these courses include a self-management course called "Effective Learning" and a course that helps students develop resiliency and confidence called "Goals for Personal Success."

### Longer Classes Allow Teachers to Employ Interactive Learning Techniques

Contacts at profiled schools emphasize that the block schedule model allows teachers to employ more interactive and project-based learning strategies in addition to direct instruction. Administrators at profiled schools observe an increase in project-based learning in all courses after the transition, most notably in subjects such as math, where direct lecture-style instruction is traditionally more common. Interactive classroom strategies include Socratic discussions, hands-on labs, and real-world problem solving.

At **School D**, teachers have more time to connect with students and discover how their students learn and what strategies they can employ to maximize their students' learning during extended block periods. Teachers organize multiple activities during a block period and can spend enough time on each activity without feeling rushed.

### Teachers Connect Real-World Events to Lessons

Social Science teachers at **School D** now show CNN Student News in class because of the additional class time provided by a block schedule. Teachers then engage students in discussions about real-world events, integrating topics discussed in their most recent lessons and connecting theories to current events.

Contacts at **School E** notice fewer lectures and more dynamic instruction in courses due to the block schedule. Many teachers have adapted their instructional strategies and change activities more frequently to keep students engaged with their course materials. Teachers use more technology-based activities in their courses with additional time to present course material and conduct activities. Teachers also include more pre- and post-assessments to gauge student learning with their extended class time. These assessments help teachers better orient lessons toward students' weaknesses and determine effective classroom activities.

## Professional Development

## Provide Professional Development on Teaching Longer Lessons Before Implementing the Block Schedule Model

Administrators at profiled schools provided professional development sessions before the initial implementation of a block schedule to help teachers adapt to 90-minute classes. These sessions focused on how to develop transitions during a longer lesson and how to engage students in project-based learning activities. A resounding theme to these professional development sessions is collaboration: administrators at most profiled schools invited teachers from local schools to collaborate with their teachers to develop instructional strategies and lesson plans for the block schedule. After the initial implementation, academic departments create and administer block schedule-related professional development sessions independently at all profiled schools.

Professional development sessions should include workshops on creating new lesson plans that suit longer block periods. Because teaching for a block period is very different than teaching for a 45-minute period, it is imperative that administrators provide support to their teachers in developing lesson plans for a block period before the actual implementation of a block schedule. Below are six key elements of an effective block period lesson plan.

**Qualities of an Effective 90-Minute Lesson Plan[2]**

- ☑ Variety in Activities and Instructional Strategies
- ☑ Smooth Transitions Between Activities
- ☑ Time to Present Information
- ☑ Time for Student Practice
- ☑ Time for Review and Closure
- ☑ Wise and Careful Planning

[2]North Carolina Public Schools. "Adjusting to the Block Methodology and Instructional Strategies." http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/worldlanguages/resources/flonblock/08adjusting.pdf

## Invite Experienced Teachers to Speak at Professional Development Sessions

Administrators at **School E** invited teachers and administrators from a neighboring high school that recently transitioned to a block schedule to present during the summer professional development session. These experienced teachers and administrators provided advice and guidance for teaching in an extended class period. The discussions with experienced teachers provided invaluable guidance for overcoming common challenges in teaching in a block period. Teachers were better prepared to start the first year with some tools and suggestions from other teachers.

Administrators at **School A** facilitated joint department meetings with academic departments from other high schools within the district to prepare their teachers for the shift to a block schedule. Departments collaborated to align curriculum to the block schedule and develop transitions within lessons. During these collaborative meetings, teachers worked together to develop content-specific transitions and activities to move smoothly through a class.

**Offer Teachers Opportunities to Observe Block Scheduled-Classrooms to Prepare for the New Schedule Model**

Contacts at **School C** express the value of observation to help teachers navigate teaching in a block schedule. Provide teachers the opportunity to observe classes in neighboring school districts, focusing on the tactics used to engage students in the learning process. Reach out to neighboring districts or other high schools in your district and ask administrators if their teachers would be interested in joining a discussion on teaching for a block period.

## Ongoing Professional Development Related to Block Schedules is Decentralized at Profiled Schools

For the first year after block schedule implementation, some profiled schools continued professional development oriented around classroom strategies. However, after the first year, administrators at profiled schools decentralized professional development specific to the block schedule to academic departments or PLCs.

Administrators at **School A** keep a running document with teachers' notes and feedback regarding the block schedule and block periods. Administrators incorporate teacher feedback into trainings and bell schedule alterations.

Departments create trainings to help teachers implement innovative learning techniques, manage student behavior, and adapt the curriculum around the block schedule. Department-run trainings prove helpful for teachers as they communicate subject-specific instructional techniques and share the collective knowledge of the department staff. These trainings evolve as teachers discover new strategies and bring them back to share in their department trainings.

PLCs provide a natural professional development opportunity as teachers continuously bring new ideas for classroom strategies to the group. PLCs often discuss new teaching strategies and student feedback on recent activities.

# 5) Research Methodology

## Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- When did contact districts switch from a traditional schedule to a block schedule?
    - What motivated contact districts to switch to block scheduling?
    - Why did contact districts choose the A/B block schedule instead of the 4/4 or integrated models?
- What is the structure of contact districts' block schedule?
- What challenges did contact districts face when designing the school day?
- How does a block schedule impact non-instructional time at contact districts?
    - Do contact districts' schedules include academic support periods for students?
    - Do contact districts' schedules include built-in collaborative planning time for teachers?
    - How did contact districts schedule lunch periods?
- How did instructional delivery change as a result of block scheduling?
- How did the transition to a block schedule impact instructional staff at contact districts?
- What support did contact districts provide to instructional staff before, during, and after implementing a block schedule?
- Did contact districts restructure professional development sessions to help teachers acquire new skills? If so, what did they include?
- Did contact districts hire additional staff to support teacher training and development during implementation? If so, how did the additional staff support implementation efforts?
- How did the transition to a block schedule impact other staff members at contact districts?
    - How did contact districts support these staff members?
- What unexpected roadblocks occurred during the transition from a traditional high school schedule to a block schedule at contact districts?
    - How did contact districts overcome these challenges?
- Does the contact district consider its implementation of a block schedule to be successful?
- What, if anything, would the contact district do differently if they could go through the implementation process again?

## Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (http://chronicle.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- DuFour, Richard. 2004. "What is a "Professional Learning Community"." *Educational leadership* 6-11.
- North Carolina Public Schools. "Adjusting to the Block Methodology and Instructional Strategies." (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/worldlanguages/resources/flonblock/08adjusting.pdf)

## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed high school administrators at the assistant principal level with significant knowledge of curriculum and instruction.

### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

| District | State | Approximate Enrollment |
|---|---|---|
| **School A** | Virginia | 1,800 |
| **School B** | Texas | 1,900 |
| **School C** | Ohio | 2,000 |
| **School D** | California | 2,000 |
| **School E** | California | 1,400 |

EAB

# Preparing Teachers for Effective Block Schedule Implementation

District Leadership Forum

# District Leadership Forum

**Teresa Liu**
*Research Associate*

**Olivia Rios**
*Senior Research Manager*

# Table of Contents

# 1) Executive Overview

## Key Observations

**Provide opportunities for teachers to learn about and observe successful block schedule implementation at other schools to garner teacher support and prepare them for the schedule model.** Prior to transitioning to a block schedule, administrators at **School B**, **School C**, and **District D** arranged for teachers to visit selected school sites with effective block schedules. In addition, administrators at District D's high schools organized a question-and-answer panel led by the teachers, the principal, and counselors from a charter high school (within the district) that had already successfully moved to this schedule. The panel addressed questions and featured both charter high school teachers who had initially objected to the schedule change and those who had demonstrated support from the beginning. Hearing insights from other teachers who had overcome their opposition to block schedules helped reluctant teachers understand and accept the schedule model.

**Provide professional development for all teachers before implementation to ensure that they can successfully teach in the block schedule.** Prior to implementation, administrators at **District D** provided two mandatory professional development days to all high school teachers who were transitioning to the block schedule. During the professional development, teachers learned the value of block schedules and effective ways to redesign lesson plans for longer classes. They also practiced developing and executing a sample lesson plan. Similarly, administrators from **School F** provided teachers with five professional development days during the summer that prioritized hands-on lesson planning time. Administrators should make professional development mandatory to ensure that all teachers learn and practice effective block schedule-specific instructional strategies.

**Use peer and evaluative classroom observations to ensure ongoing support, accountability, and success of the block schedule model.** Administrators at **School B**, **District D**, and **School E** use classroom observations as an opportunity for teachers to learn new strategies and share feedback with each other, for department chairs to identify areas of growth and provide targeted support, and for all stakeholders to ensure ongoing success of the new schedule model. During the first two years of block schedule implementation, administrators at School B encouraged and incentivized teachers to observe their peers to learn effective instructional strategies in a block period. At District D, department chairs regularly conduct classroom observations to ensure ongoing improvement and accountability to strong instructional practices in the block schedule model. Department chairs then provide feedback to district administrators on a weekly basis and collaboratively brainstorm interventions to support teachers.

**Monitor and track student outcomes to evaluate the impact of the schedule model on student learning.** Administrators at **School E** point to increasing graduation rates and a high number of graduates enrolling in colleges as evidence for the success of their schedule model. Contacts at multiple profiled districts acknowledge that not all outcomes are solely tied to schedule model design and implementation. For example, contacts at **School G** note that other academic innovation initiatives (e.g., 1:1 laptop initiative, co-teaching practices) could have added to the positive impact of block schedules on student outcomes (e.g., higher engagement during class). Yet, contacts remain confident that the schedule model factors into these positive outcomes.

# 2) Gaining Teacher Support for Block Schedules

## Motivations

### Demonstrate the Positive Impact of Block Schedules to Engage Teachers

For more information on block schedules, review EAB's brief **A/B Block Schedules for High Schools**.

Administrators should clearly communicate to teachers the value of the block schedule, to help them understand the motivations behind adopting the schedule model. Research demonstrates that block schedules promote in-depth study of content, increase instructional flexibility, and reduce transitions between classes.[1] Students in the block schedule tend to earn higher course grades, score higher on state exams, and demonstrate fewer behavioral problems.[2] In addition, teachers teaching in the block schedule report changing their instructional practices to incorporate more personalized instruction.[3] When teachers understand the impact of the schedule model on student learning, they are more likely to support the change. All profiled districts transitioned to a schedule model that incorporated longer block periods to benefit students.

**Overview of Schedule Changes at Profiled Districts**

| District / School | Block Schedule Elements | Motivation | Year of Implementing Schedule |
|---|---|---|---|
| **School A*** | A/B block with 80-minute blocks | • Deepen student learning | 2011-2012 |
| **School B** | Modified block with four-day, 90-minute blocks | • Deepen teacher-student relationships<br>• Create a later start time for students<br>• Decrease homework-related stress | 2013-2014 |
| **School C** | Flexible-modular (flex-mod) schedule with 90-minute blocks one to two times a week | • Build student responsibility<br>• Increase student choice | 2013-2014 |
| **District D** | A/B block with 95-minute blocks | • Promote project- and principle-based learning | 2016-2017 |
| **School E*** | Flex-mod schedule with 90-minute blocks up to seven times a week | • Increase students' collaboration, time management, and independent decision-making skills | 2013-2014 |
| **School F** | A/B block with 90-minute blocks | • Deepen student learning<br>• Create a later start time for students | 2015-2016 |
| **School G** | Modified block with eight, 80-minute blocks in a six-day cycle | • Deepen student learning<br>• Increase student collaboration in the classroom | 2012-2013 |

*School A was established in 2011, and School E was established in 2013.

1) Deuel, Lois-Lynn Stoyko. "Block Scheduling in Large, Urban High Schools: Effects on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior, and Staff Perceptions." The High School Journal, 1999. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364426?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.
2) Deuel, Lois-Lynn Stoyko. "Block Scheduling in Large, Urban High Schools: Effects on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior, and Staff Perceptions." The High School Journal, 1999. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364426?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.; Snyder, Dave. "4-Block Scheduling: A Case Study of Data Analysis of One High School After Two Years." Midwestern Educational Research Association, 1997. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED414626.pdf.
3) Deuel, Lois-Lynn Stoyko. "Block Scheduling in Large, Urban High Schools: Effects on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior, and Staff Perceptions." The High School Journal, 1999. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364426?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

## Align Block Schedule to District Goals of Student Learning

Contacts at all profiled districts emphasize connecting the advantages of the school schedule model to broader goals of student learning, in order to demonstrate the value of the schedule model on student outcomes. When teachers understand how the block schedule benefits student outcomes (e.g., encourages innovative practices to deepen student learning), they are more likely to support the schedule model.

For example, administrators at **School G** framed the block schedule to teachers as part of a larger school vision to move away from direct lectures and towards real-world, hands-on problem-solving and group work, in longer course periods. Similarly, administrators at **District D** integrated the block schedule into a larger vision to transform secondary education, through a focus on project-based learning.

Administrators at **School B** partnered with **Challenge Success** to survey students on socioemotional wellbeing, and then leveraged these data to demonstrate benefits of the block schedule on student learning and outcomes.

### Communication of the Block Schedule as a Solution to Student Challenges at *School B*

| Student Challenge | Advantage of Block Schedule |
|---|---|
|  Students did not feel connected to their teachers. |  Longer classes strengthen teacher-student relationships. |
|  Students felt overwhelmed with the quantity of homework. |  The block schedule reduces student stress related to homework because students balance fewer courses worth of homework each day. Administrators invited Denise Pope, leading researcher at Stanford Graduate School of Education (and co-founder of Challenge Success) to speak about the value of homework and how to effectively assign meaningful homework in the block schedule. |
|  Students did not utilize the weekly afternoon tutorial period. |  In the block schedule, administrators had the flexibility to change the underutilized tutorial into an optional morning tutorial, to create a later school start time for one day of the week. Administrators at **School F** also emphasize that their block schedule allowed them to establish a later start time for students. |
|  Students did not receive enough sleep, which negatively impacted their mental health. | |

For more information on flex-mod schedules, review EAB's brief **Flexible High School Scheduling Models**.

Both **School C** and **School E** employ a flex-mod schedule. Administrators at School C largely decided to implement the schedule to provide more student and parent choice (e.g., more flexibility with electives). Contacts note that offering a flex-mod schedule also boosted the school's appeal among students and parents within a high-achieving district with open enrollment.

Administrators at School E underlined the high level of student independence and responsibility, which prepares students for post-secondary education, when advocating for the flex-mod schedule. By conveying how the flex-mod schedule allows students to practice important skills that will help them succeed in college, administrators helped teachers see value in the schedule model.

## General Engagement Strategies

### Provide Opportunities for Teachers to Learn About and Observe Successful Block Schedule Implementation

Prior to transitioning to the block schedule model, administrators at **School C**, **District D**, and **School B** arranged for teachers to visit selected school sites with effective block schedules. By doing so, teachers see firsthand the success of the block schedule model. In addition to teachers, administrators at School C brought board members, community members, and students to tour different school sites.

Administrators at District D high schools also organized a question-and-answer panel led by the teachers, the principal, and counselors from a charter high school (within the district) that had already successfully moved to this schedule model. Teachers and staff submitted questions beforehand. The panel addressed these questions, presented value stories, and shared about the transition phase. The panel featured both charter high school teachers who had initially objected to the schedule change and those who had demonstrated support from the beginning.

Contacts at District D note that some teachers oppose block schedules simply because they do not understand the model or feel apprehensive about any change. Hearing insights from peers at another school who had overcome their opposition to block schedules helped initially reluctant teachers understand and accept the schedule model. Contacts note that after the panel, many initially reluctant teachers expressed willingness to try the schedule model.

### Select Teachers to Lead a Block Schedule Committee to Empower and Support Teachers During Change

Administrators at **School B** and **School F** established committees to incorporate teacher input into block schedule design and increase support for the change. At School F, administrators intentionally selected stakeholders that represented diverse roles across the school community, such as teachers, guidance counselors, students, and parents. Involving the community in building the block schedule model mitigates teacher concerns that block schedule implementation is a decision imposed on them by administrators.

### Block Schedule Committees at Profiled Districts

| Participants | Function |
|---|---|
| **School B**<br>  <br>• Open to all teachers and staff and led by teacher leaders (selected by administrators) who were advocates of the block schedule.<br>• The teacher-led format and absence of administrators in the meetings empowers other teachers to freely ask questions and voice concerns. | • Organized open forums for teachers and staff every other week from September to January, one year before implementation<br>• Discussed block schedule advantages and disadvantages<br>• Determined which block schedule model would work best<br>• Invited staff (e.g., custodian, office manager, attendance clerk) to share their perspectives on the block schedule (e.g., how the schedule would impact their roles)<br>• Presented final schedule to all teachers for approval, before delivering recommendation to the school board |
| **School F**<br>  <br>• Students, parents, district- and school-level staff (e.g., guidance counselor) and teachers, selected by administrators | • Met once or twice a month for the entire year before schedule implementation<br>• Explored research around the importance of sleep on student learning<br>• Discussed block schedule advantages and disadvantages<br>• Designed a block schedule<br>• Presented recommendation to the school board |

When the committee at School B presented the final block schedule to all teachers in January, over 90 percent approved the change and agreed to pilot the new schedule in the fall. By garnering robust teacher buy-in for the block schedule prior to finalizing the change, administrators increase the likelihood of implementation success.

## Maintain Open Channels of Communication to Create a Positive Culture of Collaboration and Support

Administrators should create open channels of communication for teachers to voice their concerns and ask questions throughout the planning and implementation stages. Contacts at **School B**, **School C**, **District D**, and **School E** point to the importance of creating a culture of collaboration, prior to and before the new schedule implementation, so that teachers feel adequately supported.

## Strategies to Maintain Open Communication and Boost Morale Among Teachers at Profiled Districts

| Goal | Execution |
|---|---|
|  Promote collaboration between teachers and administrators to solve challenges | • Embrace an "all-hands-on-deck" mentality. Emphasize that teachers are not working *for* administrators. Rather, teachers are working *with* administrators to ensure success of the block schedule model.<br>• Designate one administrative point person of support. At **School E**, an academic dean led weekly collaborative meetings with teachers to help them overcome initial challenges. At **School B**, the assistant principal served as the point person. |
|  Take frequent pulse checks to obtain teacher feedback | • Regularly survey teachers to gauge current challenges and successes.<br>• Use an online platform (e.g., Google Docs) to anonymously survey teacher concerns and frustrations and capture perspectives from teachers who might not be comfortable sharing their opinions in person. |
|  Maintain transparency | • Acknowledge that change is difficult. Cultivate a growth mindset by reminding teachers that mistakes represent learning opportunities.<br>• Be honest when administrators do not have immediate answers for specific teacher questions. |
|  Emphasize the larger vision of change transformation | • Remind teachers of the benefits of the block schedule on student success in classrooms.<br>• Encourage teachers to experiment with different instructional practices and classroom strategies. |

Resistant Teacher Engagement

## Proactively Diagnose and Engage with Teachers Who Demonstrate Resistance and Apprehension Around Change

To effectively mitigate teacher resistance to the block schedule model, administrators should commit to listening to teachers' perspectives, diagnosing the root cause of teacher opposition, and applying a tailored solution to remedy resistance. Contacts at profiled districts emphasize the importance of engaging early on with teachers who demonstrate opposition to the schedule.

### Addressing Teacher Resistance to the Block Schedule at Profiled Districts

| Root Cause of Resistance | Targeted Solution |
|---|---|
| Does not understand or see the value in the block schedule model. | Arrange for teachers to visit schools and witness the benefits of the schedule model in real classrooms. |
| Worries that the block schedule releases teaching time and subsequently reduces staff numbers. | Clarify that administrators will not eliminate any teacher positions. |
| Has unanswered questions and concerns, and/or feels apprehensive about change. | • Encourage teachers to attend open forums or committee meetings.<br>• Encourage teachers to connect with influential peer advocates of the block schedule model.<br>• Schedule 1:1 time with teachers to address concerns. |

In addition, administrators should periodically gauge all teacher voices, to accurately track teacher support for the block schedule. At **School B**, administrators gauged teacher engagement with the schedule model by establishing the expectation that during staff meetings, once an individual shares their opinion, they have to wait until everyone else has had the opportunity to voice their perspective before speaking again. This allows administrators to capture all perspectives and ensure that the biggest dissenters do not disproportionately occupy the feedback space and negatively influence group morale.

## Address Limitations of the Block Schedule and Proactively Brainstorm Solutions

Administrators should be open and transparent with teachers about the challenges and limitations inherent within the block schedule model. Administrators should treat challenges as opportunities to collaborate with teachers to develop solutions, such as creating specific block schedule modifications.

For more information on modified block schedules, review EAB's brief **Integrated Academic Support Time**.

### Remedying Limitations of the Block Schedule at *School A*

| | Challenge | Solution |
|---|---|---|
|  | If a student misses a day of school, they lose more content from each class than in a traditional, seven-period-day schedule. | Administrators established high priority subjects, math and English Language Arts (ELA) as daily block classes (while Social Studies, science, and elective courses meet every other day). If a student misses a day of school, they will still attend ELA and math the following day. |
|  | Block schedules present challenges for subjects where students might benefit from everyday contact, such as math. | |
|  | In the block schedule, teachers may administer exams to sections on different days. This can inadvertently lead to more cheating incidences (i.e., students sharing answers, which leads to a skewed perception of student understanding). | Administrators and teachers designed more open-ended test questions, to discourage students from cheating. |
|  | The block schedule requires more teacher preparation time. | Administrators provided ample summer professional development to allow teachers to collaboratively prepare lesson plans. |

# 3) Teacher Preparation and Training

Before Implementation

## Establish an Instructional Committee to Brainstorm Best Practices for Teaching in the Block Schedule

Implementing any new schedule model reorganizes how student and teachers navigate the academic day. The block schedule does not automatically guarantee higher student achievement. Contacts at all profiled districts emphasize the importance of providing significant training to teachers so they can effectively deliver instruction to students in a new academic environment (i.e., longer class periods).

To equip teachers with effective instructional strategies, administrators at **School G** set up a cross-departmental instructional committee of teachers, parents, and students. For example, they discussed structuring each math block around a different problem-solving strategy and designing investigative labs for science blocks. The committee then shared instructional strategies with the whole staff, and teachers from each department worked together to create content-specific lesson plan templates, in preparation for block schedule implementation.

### Instructional Committee at *School G*

| Committee Members | Number |
|---|---|
| Principal | One |
| Teachers | Eight to ten |
| Students | Two |
| Parents | Two |

Committee members volunteered to participate in the committee. The committee met after school on a monthly basis, in the year prior to implementing the new schedule.

In addition to establishing a similar instructional committee, administrators and teachers at **School C** consulted with a nearby school (in another district) that was implementing a similar schedule during the same year, to discuss instructional best practices.

## Designate Strong Department Chairs to Lead Teachers Through the Schedule Implementation Phase

Administrators at **School B** intentionally selected strong teachers and advocates of the block schedule to serve as department chairs and facilitate teachers' transition into the new block schedule model. During the implementation phase, department chairs requested support from administrators when needed. For example, the science department chair requested that an educator experienced in the block schedule from the county office come and help the science teachers with effective lesson plan design and common assessments. Designating strong department chairs to guide teachers through the implementation phase helps to ensure a smoother transition into the block schedule. By distributing leadership responsibilities to department chairs, administrators ensure that teachers feel empowered to lead the change management process.

Professional Development

## Provide Professional Development in the First Year of Implementation on Effective Teaching in the Block Schedule

Administrators at **District D** and **School F** provided professional development in the summer before implementation to prepare teachers for the block schedule. For example, administrators at **School F** provided teachers with five professional development days during the summer that prioritized hands-on planning time. Teacher leaders in the district hosted workshops and discussions on the value of backwards planning and best practices, and supported teachers as they created content-specific lesson templates. Administrators at **School C** compensated all teachers 40 hours of curriculum pay over the summer, so that they could plan and prepare for deployment of the new schedule.

Administrators should make professional development mandatory to ensure that all teachers learn and practice effective block schedule-specific instructional strategies. By providing professional development at different points in the first year of implementation, administrators at District D ensured that teachers built a strong understanding of the block schedule, had instructional tools for the school year, and received consistent support. This multi-pronged professional development approach guarantees both accountability and ongoing success of the block schedule model.

### Multi-Pronged Professional Development Approach at *District D*

**SUMMER**

- **Day 1:** Instructional coaches led teachers through following questions: Why does the block schedule work? How does the block schedule facilitate more hands-on, in-depth learning?
- **Day 2:** In small groups, teachers practiced developing and executing a lesson plan within the block schedule.
- After the two days, teachers scheduled additional time to work with department colleagues on content-specific lesson plans.

**START OF SCHOOL YEAR**

- As a refresher to summer professional development, the principal and teachers discussed daily learning targets, mapped out a sample lesson plan, and brainstormed how to creatively restructure the classroom (e.g., alternatives to arranging desks in straight rows).
- Principals shared non-content-specific instructional strategies and tools (e.g., Word of the Week, activities to "open" and "close" a class, **Kahoot!**).
- Teachers created and discussed content-specific lesson plans. For example, science teachers discussed framing lessons around claim-evidence reasoning, and Social Studies teachers brainstormed orienting lessons around document-based questions.

**WEEKLY**

- District administrators held an optional monthly, after-school meeting (open to both new and experienced teachers) to review instructional practices, discuss challenges, and brainstorm solutions.
- Department chairs, principals, and/or instructional coaches often attended to provide additional support (e.g., content delivery, classroom structure/climate).

Administrators at **District D** provided two mandatory summer professional development days to all 300 teachers who were transitioning to the block schedule. Currently, all teachers new to a district high school must participate in these summer professional development days, as well as two (recently developed) training days on effective teamwork and project-based learning.

## Design Professional Development After Classroom Expectations to Model Robust Instructional Practices for Teachers

Contacts at **School E** emphasize that all professional learning should model the expectations of a teacher's role in the classroom—regardless if the professional learning is related to the block schedule. The principal, assistant principal, and instructional coaches who lead professional development sessions should act as facilitators, rather than lecturers, and prioritize teacher engagement and practice. Modeling the teaching style district administrators expect teachers to employ

in block schedules continues to reinforce strong instructional practices after initial professional development and schedule implementation.

**Teacher Experts at *School A* Lead Professional Development for Their Peers**

At **School A**, administrators select teacher leaders to develop lessons, curriculum, and professional development for other teachers. Contacts emphasize that teachers, instead of administrators, should develop and lead professional development because teachers hold credibility among their peers due to shared experiences. Teacher leaders provide coaching on curriculum and instruction to help their colleagues within the department teach effectively in the block schedule.

## Integrate Teacher Planning Time into the Schedule to Allow Collaboration on Effective Strategies for the Block Schedule

Administrators at **School A** and **School C** embed collaborative planning time into teachers' weekly schedules. At School A, where students take ELA and math classes every day, ELA and math teachers meet twice a week. For other subjects that meet every other day, teachers meet once a week. During this meeting time, teachers gather to discuss the curriculum, analyze student work (e.g., identify gaps in student learning, celebrate growth), and collaboratively address challenges within their content area.

Similarly, administrators at **School C** integrate a 90-minute planning period in the weekly schedule for teachers from the same grade and content area (e.g., ninth grade, social studies teachers) to collaborate. In the flex-mod schedule at School C, three teachers from the same grade and content area combine their 30-minute classes into a shared 90-minute period, once or twice a week. The teachers share delivery of instruction during these 90-minute periods. The weekly planning time allows teachers to develop their co-teaching approach for the 90-minute period.

## Consider Partnering with External Organizations for Professional Development to Strengthen Teachers' Instructional Practices

Administrators at **School A** and **School E** partner with external organizations to provide professional development to teachers on effective instructional practices in their schedule models. School A leverages professional development from Uncommon Schools, a charter school and public school district network. Specifically, administrators cite professional development around active monitoring, in order to promote active student learning in a longer block period. Administrators send teacher representatives to attend off-site professional development sessions. Teacher representatives then come back to the school and deliver professional development to the rest of the teachers.

## External Partnerships for Professional Development at *School E*

| | Characteristics | Function |
|---|---|---|
|  **Critical Friends Group (CFG)** | • CFG is a type of professional learning community (PLC) certified by the National School Reform Faculty.<br>• A CFG-certified coach leads a group of teachers (i.e., five to 12) within a school.<br>• The group meets for a minimum of two hours per month. | • Teachers examine and hone their classroom practices through honest, constructive feedback from peers and CFG coach, and collaborative discussion.<br>• For example, teachers might focus on designing learning goals that are clear enough to be observed in a classroom by a peer or coach.<br>• Teachers in a CFG can also attend regional and national meetings to broaden their network of support. |
|  **Expeditionary Learning (EL) Education** | • EL Education is a professional network of public schools and charter schools.<br>• Focuses on the three dimensions of student achievement: mastery of knowledge and skills, high quality work, and character.<br>• A member district can access digital resources, professional learning off-campus, and annual, national conferences. | • Administrators contract with an EL Education Professional Development coach who helps teachers with instructional design and student engagement in the classroom, through the workshop model (i.e., students spend most of the block period working on a hands-on project). Last year, administrators contracted the professional development coach for 25 days on-site. |

### Profiled Districts Leverage Current External Partnerships to Support Block Schedule Implementation

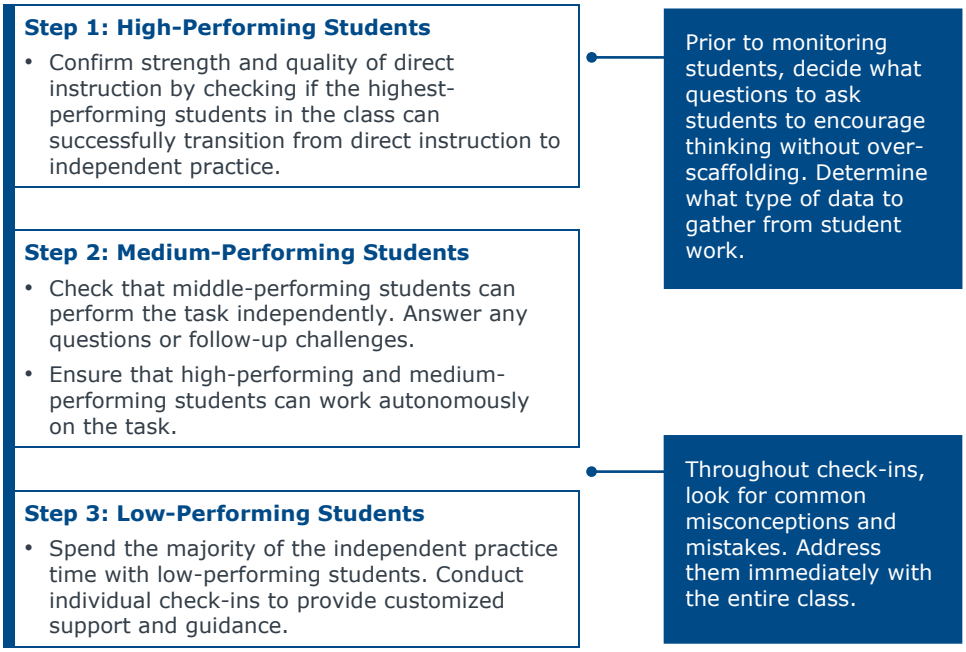
Administrators from **School B** invited educators from the county office with expertise in the block schedule to provide customized support in instructional practices to specific departments. Administrators at **District D** leveraged their existing partnership with **Ford Next Generation Learning** to receive support during the block schedule implementation process.

## Prioritize Student Application of Skills and Active Monitoring to Promote High Student Engagement in the Classroom

Contacts at multiple profiled districts emphasize that, in an effective block period, teachers do not lecture for the entire block, nor do they simply break up a 90-minute block into two 45-minute lessons or allow students to complete homework during class. Instead, the most effective teachers prioritize active learning to build student understanding, engagement, and agency.

Administrators and teachers at **School A** orient block periods around in-depth, independent student practice. In this framework, teachers deliver robust, direct instruction for a maximum of 20 minutes and actively monitor student understanding and progress during assigned practices for the rest of the class. When teachers release students to complete independent work, they use the following active monitoring strategy.

### Active Monitoring Strategy at *School A*




Active monitoring centers on analyzing student work, providing feedback in real-time, and adjusting instruction based on observations. In addition, assigning exit tickets allows teachers to gauge student understanding of new topics, informing the direction of the next block period. Contacts note that, by using active monitoring, teachers execute highly effective and productive block classes.

## Overview of 80-Minute English Language Arts Block at *School A*[4]

**"Do Now": Student Work Time (5-7 minutes)**

- Students answer questions on the previous day's independent reading.

**Vocabulary Study (10 minutes)**

- Students work in pairs to apply knowledge of vocabulary.
- The whole class debriefs one or two of the most difficult vocabulary words.

**Exit Ticket Preview (1-2 minutes)**

- Teacher reviews the exit ticket (i.e., guiding question for the day) and task to frame the lesson.
- For example, an exit ticket might be, "on pages 43-45 of *Lord of the Flies*, does William Golding demonstrate that people are born evil or that they become evil through their experiences?"

**Close Reading, Part 1 (8-10 minutes)**

- Students perform a deep dive into a section of the previous day's independent reading that will help them answer the exit ticket.

**Close Reading, Part 2 (8-10 minutes)**

- Students perform the above task for another section of the previous day's independent reading.

**Whole Class Discussion (8 minutes)**

- Class collectively verbally processes the exit ticket question, which is designed to surface robust discussion and encourage students to practice identifying strong evidence.

**Exit Ticket (12 minutes)**

- Students independently answer exit ticket question, typically in paragraph form.

**Active Monitoring During Independent Reading (15-20 minutes)**

- Students independently conduct first read of the following class's focus pages and completes comprehension questions.
- Teacher circulates the room. The teacher checks exit tickets (and follows up on those requiring immediate revision) or monitors for accurate reading comprehension.

4) School A, provided July 3, 2019.

Indirect instruction in math is supported by the research of Jo Boaler (Professor of Mathematics Education at Stanford Graduate School of Education), **Cognitively Guided Instruction**, and **Thinking Mathematically**.

Math teachers at **School A** emphasize indirect instruction, which also aligns with the Common Core standards. Through this pedagogical approach, teachers encourage students to take risks and promote discovery of mathematics through a combination of independent, partner, and class activities. For example, teachers encourage students to work with partners or small groups to apply their background knowledge and best thinking to an unfamiliar task.

## Overview of 80-Minute Math Block at *School A*[5]

**"Do Now": Student Work Time (8 minutes)**

- The "do now" is characterized by two purposes—to activate learning for the lesson and to frontload, foreshadow, or remediate a concept or skill.
- Teacher actively monitors the students, providing feedback and extensions.

**"Do Now": Class Conversation (12 minutes)**

- The conversation extends the math concept and adds depth.

**Task: Student Work Time (6-10 minutes)**

- Teacher poses a task that promotes independent engagement in the Common Core standards for mathematical practice.
- Teacher monitors student work—not for feedback purposes but rather to prepare to facilitate a student-driven class conversation.

**Task: Debrief (10-15 minutes)**

- Teacher places one or more student's work under the document camera. The work displays a new student strategy, a new mathematical rule, or a helpful representation that will benefit the rest of the class.
- Teacher then poses questions to allow the rest of the community to access, understand, and replicate the new mathematics.
- Teacher gives students action steps, such as "Use your classmate's strategy to solve this problem" or "summarize how your classmate used a table as a tool."

**Partner Practice to Apply New Learning (10-15 minutes)**

- Teacher assigns new material that is very similar to the previous task and increases in complexity.
- Teacher does not give students an "exit ticket" to assess them on this newest learning. Instead, students leverage the support of a partner.
- Teacher circulates to provide feedback and extensions.

**Independent Practice (20-25 minutes)**

- Students work on a cumulative practice (e.g., five items from the previous week's learning and five items on the new topic) independently while teachers actively monitor and provide feedback.
- Before the teacher deems an item appropriate for independent practice, students must have already practiced with partners on previous occasions and revisited the item on "do nows".

5) School A, provided July 5, 2019.

## Consider the Workshop Model to Promote Student-Centered Instruction

Effective teachers design lessons that encourage students to engage in multiple skills (e.g., learning new content, building understanding, applying knowledge in the same lesson).[6] By doing so, teachers ultimately allow students to deepen their understanding and foster student motivation and agency. In response, teachers at **School E** design instruction around the workshop model, in which students spend most of the block period working on a hands-on project independently, in pairs, or in groups.[7]

The workshop model includes both direct instruction and hands-on learning, to maximize time for students to apply their new knowledge. At School E, teachers easily adapt the workshop model (i.e., vary time allotted for independent student work time) to fit 30-, 60-, and 90-minute classes within their flex-mod schedule. They use clear and measurable daily and long-term learning targets to guide instruction for students. Contacts emphasize that the workshop model creates a shift in teacher attitude and mindset. The teacher transitions from authority figure of knowledge to active facilitator of student voice and learning.

### Workshop Model for a Block Period at *School E*[8]

**"Do Now": Warm-Up (5 minutes)**

- Students complete brief assignment (e.g., reading, writing, editing, solving a problem) independently.

**Direct Instruction (15-20 minutes)**

- The teacher delivers instruction to the whole class.
- The teacher outlines expectations for the independent work that students will complete next.

**Independent Student Work Time (varies)**

- Students work on a task independently, in pairs, or in small groups.
- The teacher circulates for a few minutes to make sure everyone is on task, and then conducts 1:1 check-ins and re-delivers direct instruction to a smaller group if needed.

**Debrief (5 minutes)**

- With the whole class, the teacher reviews the learning target of the day, showcases and discusses an example of student work, and/or assigns an exit ticket.

6) Berger, Ron. "We Learn by Doing: What Educators Get Wrong About Bloom's Taxonomy." Education Week, 2018. https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/09/26/we-learn-by-doing-what-educators-get.html.
7) "The Workshop Model." New York Department of Education. Accessed July 10, 2019. https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Workshop-model-planning2.pdf.
8) Ibid.

# 4) Ensuring and Measuring Ongoing Success

Continued Value

## Use Peer and Evaluative Classroom Observations to Ensure Ongoing Support, Success, and Accountability

Through classroom observations, administrators at multiple profiled districts ensure ongoing success of the new schedule model.

### The Benefits of Classroom Observations on Block Schedule Success

- ☑ Teachers learn new instructional practices from each other.
- ☑ Observing teachers, department chairs, and administrators provide constructive feedback on specific criteria (e.g., visibility and usage of learning targets, prioritization of active learning in the classroom). They follow up with customized support to help teachers maximize the longer instructional time in a block period.
- ☑ Teachers and administrators celebrate block schedule successes in the classroom.

During the first two years of block schedule implementation, administrators at **School B** encouraged and incentivized teachers to shadow their peers to learn effective instructional strategies in a block period. Administrators provided substitute teachers and/or additional compensation to ensure teachers had ample opportunities to observe their peers without sacrificing preparatory time. Contacts note that peer observations help teachers better understand how to create a clear agenda and learning objectives, and effectively manage instructional time.

At **District D**, department chairs regularly conduct classroom observations to ensure ongoing improvement and accountability to strong instructional practices in the block schedule model. To ensure consistent support for teachers in the block schedule, particularly for newer teachers, administrators embed an instructional support hour into each department chair's weekly schedule.

### Classroom Observations Approach at *District D*

1. Department chairs observe individual teachers in their classrooms, using an observation rubric focused on classroom structure, teaching quality, and clear learning targets.
2. Department chairs share feedback with district administrators in weekly meetings.
3. Department chairs and district administrators collectively brainstorm interventions to support teachers. For example, district administrators might ask an instructional coach to provide additional support to a teacher who demonstrates strength in content but challenges with discipline in a block period. For a teacher who demonstrates strong relationships with students but struggles with content delivery, the department chair might work with them 1:1 to discuss instructional strategies that maximize the longer class time.
4. Department chairs also observe teachers in other content areas to learn and gather strategies that could be applied to their own content area.

Classroom observations also can surface areas of growth to ensure ongoing improvement of the schedule model. For example, at **School E**, teachers would often pose rhetorical questions to gauge student understanding of content. However, when a teacher asks, "Does anyone have a question?" or "Does that make sense?", they inadvertently allow lack of a response to be confirmation of student understanding. One solution is to pose a question, ask students to discuss the answer in pairs, and then select a few pairs to share their response with the whole class. Contacts note that this strategy helps to boost student engagement and equity in the classroom.

#### Train and Provide Lesson Plans to Substitute Teachers to Ensure Consistent, High Instructional Quality

Administrators and department chairs at **District D** collaborate to prepare substitute teachers to teach block classes. Administrators provide training on effective teaching during block schedules to substitutes. Department chairs ensure that when teachers plan to be absent, they provide substitute teachers with a clearly developed and instructionally sound lesson plan.

## Create Professional Learning Opportunities for Teachers to Strengthen Instructional Practices and Actively Workshop Challenges

Teachers at **School C** share specific best practices and value stories during all-faculty meetings, and collaboratively tackle challenges in department meetings. Administrators highlight positive examples of teaching in the block schedule and workshop shared challenges to encourage faculty resilience and to build engagement with the new schedule model.

In addition, teachers at School C participate in PLCs to ensure ongoing accountability around high-quality instruction, and ultimately ensure the success of teaching practices in the block schedule.

### Sample Discussion Topics in PLCs at *School C*

- ☑ Common assessments (e.g., format, analysis)
- ☑ Analysis of student data
- ☑ Alignment of curriculum with school-specific standards
- ☑ Collaborative teaming to build an inclusive school
- ☑ Student equity

For more information on PLCs, review EAB's brief **Professional Learning Communities**.

Similarly, teachers at **School E** engage in PLCs to connect instruction in the block schedule to the larger school-wide vision of student learning. For one hour every other week, teachers meet in interdisciplinary teams to engage in one facilitated topic. Last year's topic focused on ensuring equity and supporting students with trauma. Across the year, teachers learned about trauma-informed education (e.g., how different experiences of trauma might impact a student's ability to learn, how to cultivate awareness of and manage implicit bias), practiced these strategies in the block schedule, and observed each other in the classroom and provided constructive feedback.

## Outcomes

### Survey School Stakeholders to Gauge Impact of New Schedule

Contacts at **School B**, **School C**, **School E**, and **School G** emphasize the importance of surveying teachers after schedule implementation, particularly in the first year. Administrators at School C conducted informal, monthly staff surveys to understand how teachers were doing. After the first three years of the new schedule, the school board formally polled students, teachers, and parents to analyze the effects of the schedule and pinpoint areas of improvement.

### Three-Year, Post-Implementation Sample Survey Questions at *School C*[9]

| Stakeholders | Questions |
|---|---|
|  **All** | • What do you like about the schedule?<br>• What do you find most challenging about the schedule?<br>• Any additional comments that would be beneficial as we continue with this schedule? |
|  **Students** | • What grade are you currently in?<br>• What are your plans after graduation?<br>• On a scale of one to four, how knowledgeable do you feel about the schedule?<br>• On a scale of one to four, how do you feel about the schedule? |
|  **Teachers** | • How many years have you been teaching?<br>• How has the schedule affected your students' learning?<br>• How do you use your collaboration time?<br>• What professional development opportunities do you feel you need to be more successful in the schedule? |
|  **Parents** | • What grade are your students in at the high school?<br>• How many students do you currently have at the high school?<br>• Do you have a student who has graduated in the last five years?<br>• How knowledgeable do you feel about the schedule?<br>• How do you think your son/daughter/children feel(s) about the schedule in general? |

## Monitor the Impact of the Block Schedule on Student Learning by Regularly Tracking Student Progress

Contacts at multiple profiled districts recommend consistently monitoring student progress to determine the impact of the block schedule on student learning. For example, teachers at **School A** administer interim assessments every eight weeks (in addition to testing students at the end of each three-to-four-week-long unit). Administrators keep interim assessments results over multiple years, so that they can compare student learning from one year to the next.

Contacts at **School A** note that improved student performance and growth also helps administrators continue to build buy-in for the schedule model among teachers and other stakeholders.

At **School E**, teachers and administrators track and present three dimensions of student achievement (i.e., mastery of knowledge and skill, high quality work, character) on a physical "learning wall" in the professional development room. Contacts note that showcasing student outcomes in this manner ensures that teachers and administrators can access and view the data at any time, celebrate strengths and successes, and discuss areas of improvement. Teachers and administrators gather data at multiple points during the year.

9) School C, provided June 20, 2019.

### Sample Student Metrics Tracked at *School E*

| Goal | Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics |
|---|---|
| **Mastery of Knowledge and Skill**<br>All students will develop a rich conceptual understanding of skills and content, be able to communicate about their learning, and apply skills and knowledge to solve real-world problems. | • AP classes: number of students enrolled, distribution of gender and race, test results<br>• Dual enrollment courses: number of students enrolled, average course pass rate<br>• Graduation rates<br>• Amount of scholarship money awarded<br>• First semester grade report results<br>• End-of-course assessment results |
| **High Quality Work**<br>Students will create multiple pieces of work that display craftsmanship, complexity, and authenticity. | • Student work (e.g., projects) |
| **Character**<br>Students will graduate with character and develop a deep connection to their community. | • Community service initiatives<br>• Discipline rates |

## Analyze Overall Student Outcomes Data and Anecdotal Evidence to Gauge Effectiveness of Schedule Model

Contacts at **School E** and **School G** point to positive academic and behavioral outcomes as evidence of success of their course schedule. For example, contacts at School E note that their flex-mod schedule creates additional time for teachers and students to meet outside of class and gives students the opportunity to practice organization and time management skills. School E graduates who attend college report feeling confident in collaborating with professors during office hours and managing their time.

### Student Outcome Improvements Since Adoption of Course Schedules

| | Academic and Behavioral Outcomes |
|---|---|
| **School E** | • Increased graduation rates (i.e., from 81 percent in 2014 to over 94 percent in 2019)<br>• 90 percent of graduates enroll in two- or four-year colleges<br>• Increased college scholarships<br>• Increased teacher retention rates |
| **School G** | • Increased state test scores<br>• Decreased number of in-class disruptions<br>• Decreased number of disruptive hallway incidents (e.g., student fights)<br>• Increased student attendance |

Contacts at School E and School G acknowledge that not all outcomes are solely tied to schedule model design and implementation. For example, contacts at School G acknowledge that other academic innovation initiatives (e.g., 1:1 laptop initiative, co-teaching practices) could have added to the positive impact of block schedules on student outcomes (e.g., higher engagement during class). Yet, contacts at both districts believe that the schedule model definitively factors into these outcomes.

# 5) Research Methodology

## Project Challenges

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How do contact districts employ block schedules?
- When did contact districts initially implement block schedules?
- How did contact districts gather teacher support for the shift from a traditional to block schedule model?
- What professional development did contact districts provide to prepare teachers for longer courses with block schedule implementation?
- What strategies do teachers at contact districts employ to maximize additional instructional time in block schedules?
- What strategies do teachers at contact districts employ to ensure high student engagement, given additional class time in block schedules?
- How do contact districts support teachers to ensure ongoing success for the block schedule model?
- Do contact districts partner (or consider partnering) with a third-party organization to provide professional development to teachers in preparation for or during block schedule implementation?
- How do contact districts respond to initial and ongoing challenges of block schedule implementation?
- How do contact districts evaluate the success of the block schedule model, specifically on the impact on student outcomes?

## Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

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## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed school and district-level administrators.

### A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

| District / School | Location | Approximate Enrollment |
|---|---|---|
| **School A** | Mountain West | 900 |
| **School B** | Pacific West | 800 |
| **School C** | Midwest | 1,100 |
| **District D** | Midwest | 19,100 |
| **School E** | South | 2,000 |
| **School F** | Pacific West | 1,400 |
| **School G** | Mid-Atlantic | 1,300 |