

ORANGE COUNTY
BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date: November 21, 2011

AGENDA ITEM No. 11-11-(2)-11

ACTION: (Y/N) N

SUBJECT: Block Scheduling Report

INFO. CONTACT: Dr. Denise Morton PHONE: 919 732-8126

ATTACHMENTS: 1. Block Scheduling Multi-year Data Review
2. Results from Teacher, Administrator and Student focus groups
3. Block Scheduling Staffing Analysis for the high schools
4. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Block Schedule from DPI Website

PURPOSE: To provide the Board of Education a report on block scheduling in the district's high schools.

BACKGROUND: The decision to change from a traditional six period day to block scheduling came after a 50 member high school task force met from February, 2005, until May of 2005 to study the high schools and potential reform efforts. The task force ultimately provided multiple recommendations to the Board of Education on how to better improve high school instruction. One of those recommendations was to change the schedule configuration to a block or semester long schedule.

On January 23, 2006, the Orange County Board of Education unanimously approved a staff recommendation to implement block scheduling in the district's two high schools beginning the fall of 2006. Block scheduling has now been in place at both high schools for five years. As one of its 2010 priorities, the Board of Education directed staff to assess effectiveness since implementation and offer other observations about block.

Of the 417 high schools in North Carolina, over 85% of them currently operate on a block or hybrid block schedule. The remainder of schools operate using other scheduling protocols.

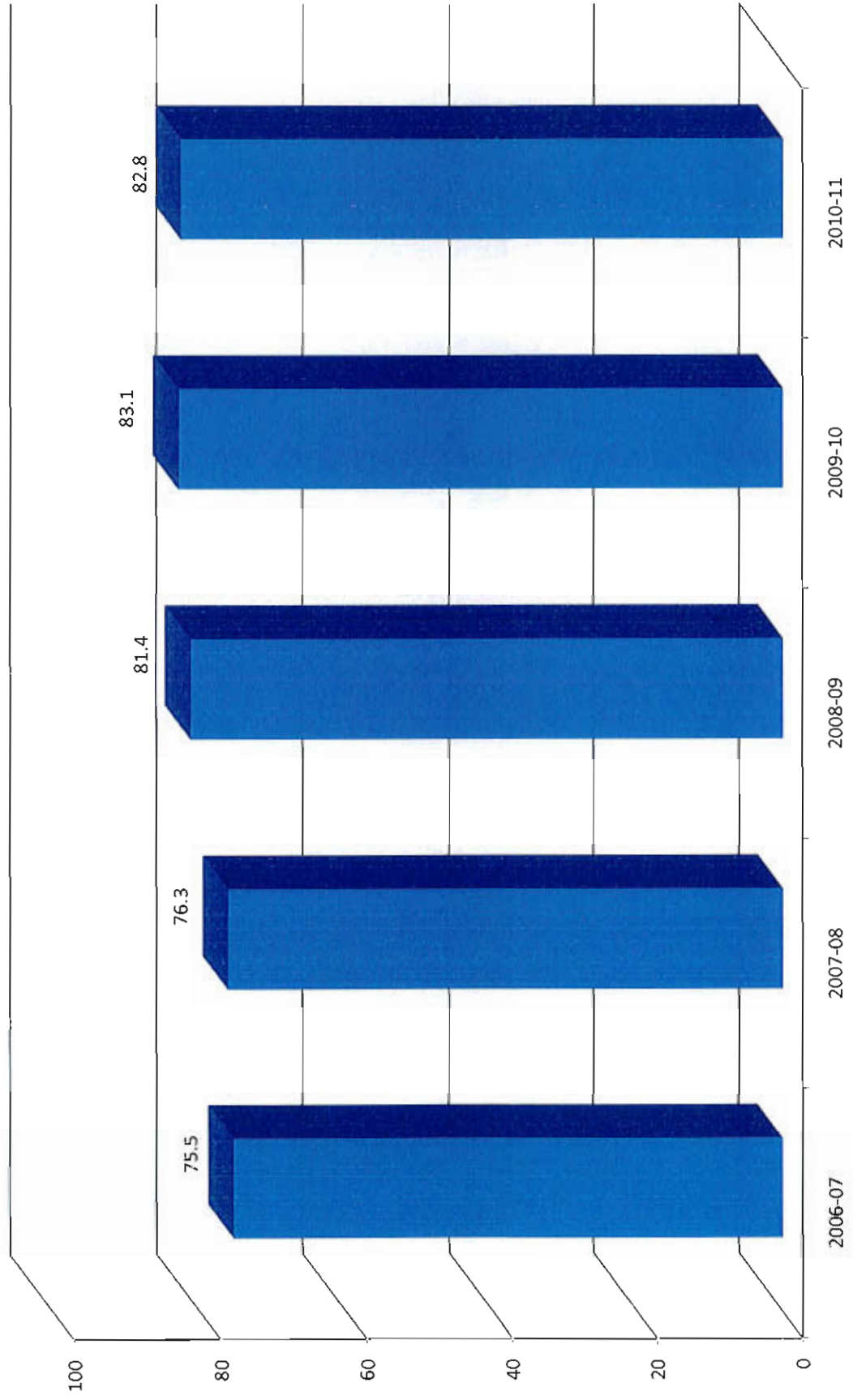
FINANCIAL IMPACT: None

RECOMMENDATION: The Superintendent recommends that the Board of Education receive for information the block scheduling report.

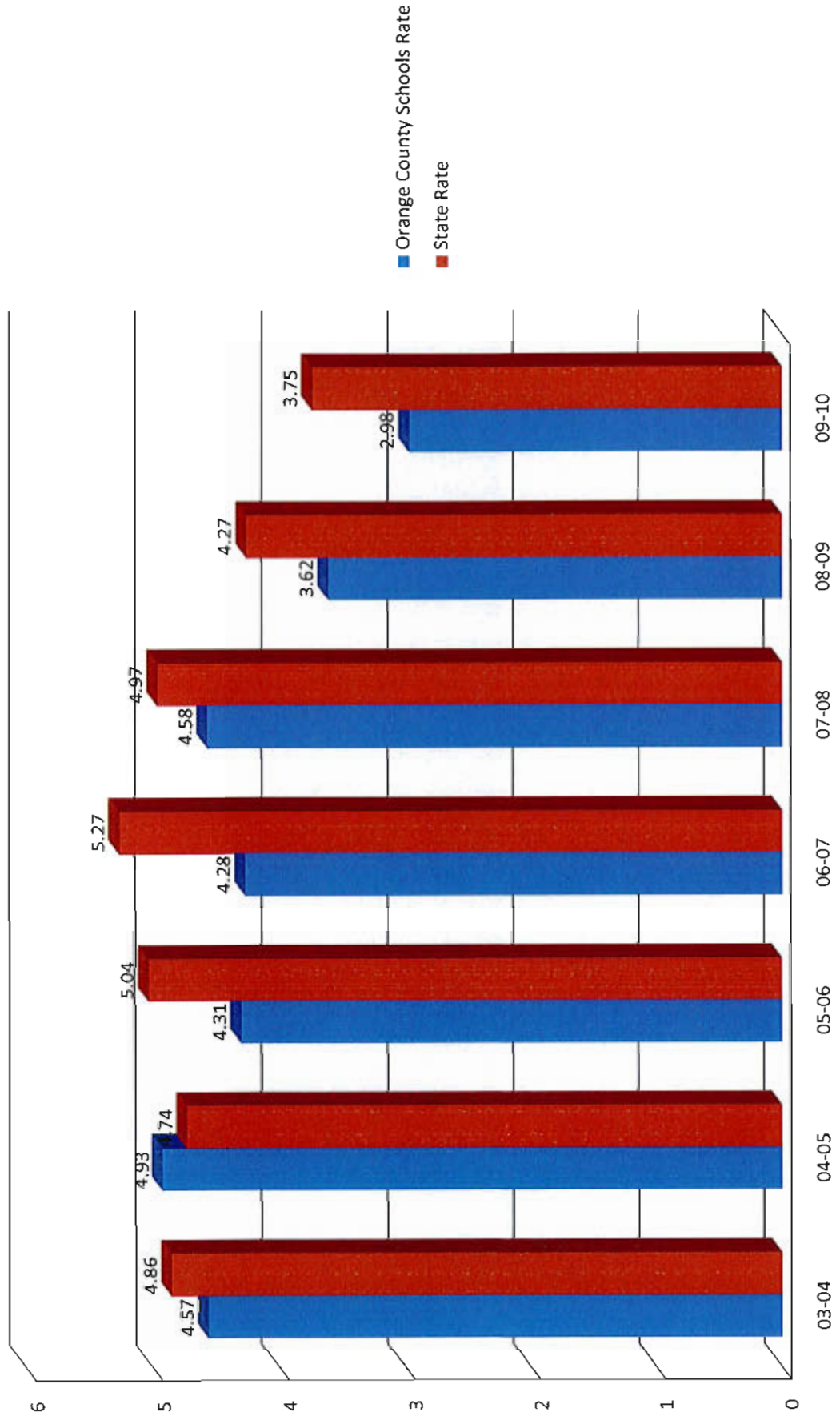
Block Scheduling Multi-year Data Review

- Graduation Rate Analysis 2006-07 to 2010-11
- Dropout Rates 2003-04 to 2009-10
- Number of Dropouts 2003-04 to 2010-11
- SAT Comparison – Composite Scores 2005-06 to 2010-11
- Algebra I EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- Algebra II EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- Physical Science EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- English I EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- Civics & Economics EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- US History EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- Biology EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11
- AP Enrollment and Student Performance: Five Year Comparison

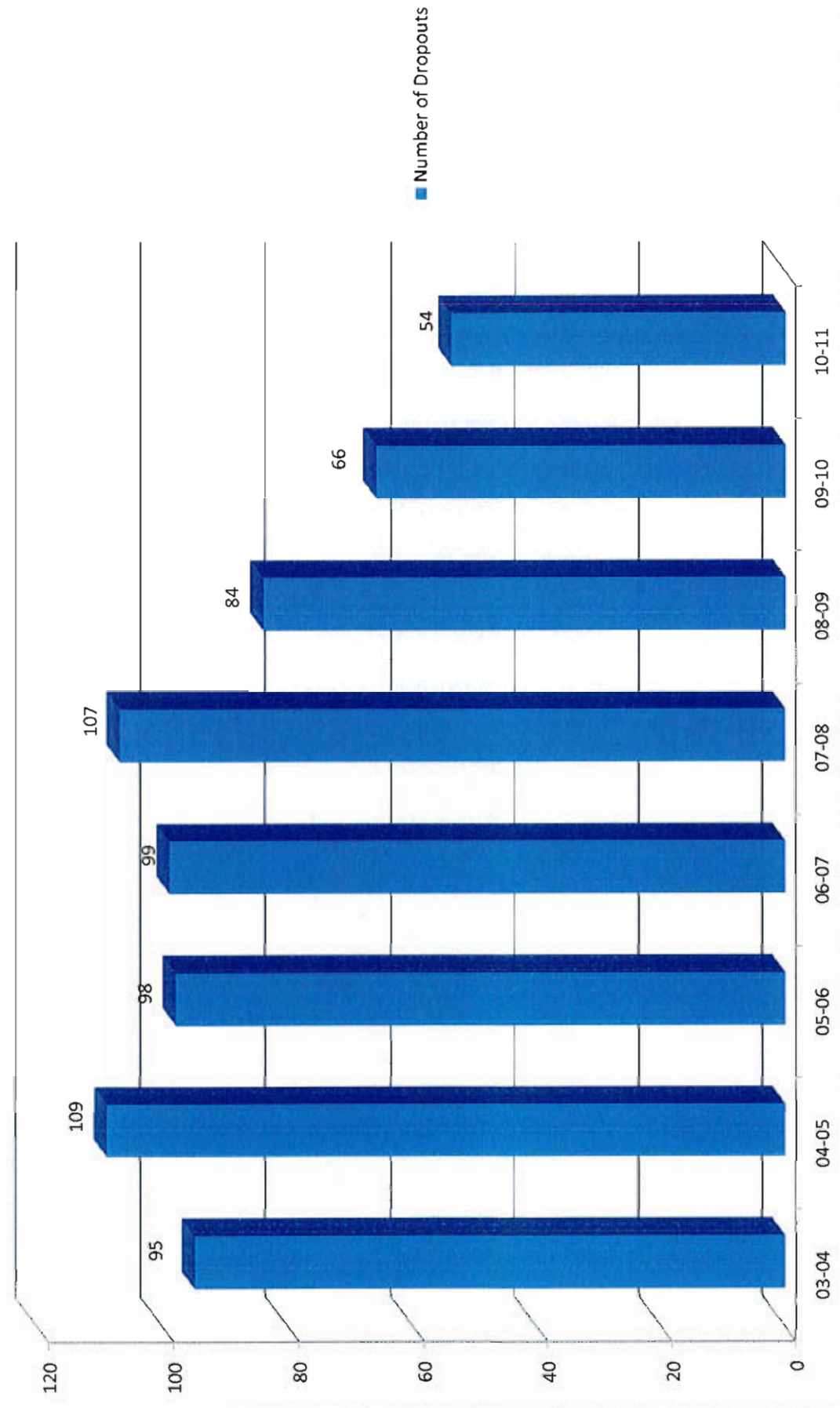
Orange County Schools Graduation Rate Analysis 2006-07 to 2010-11



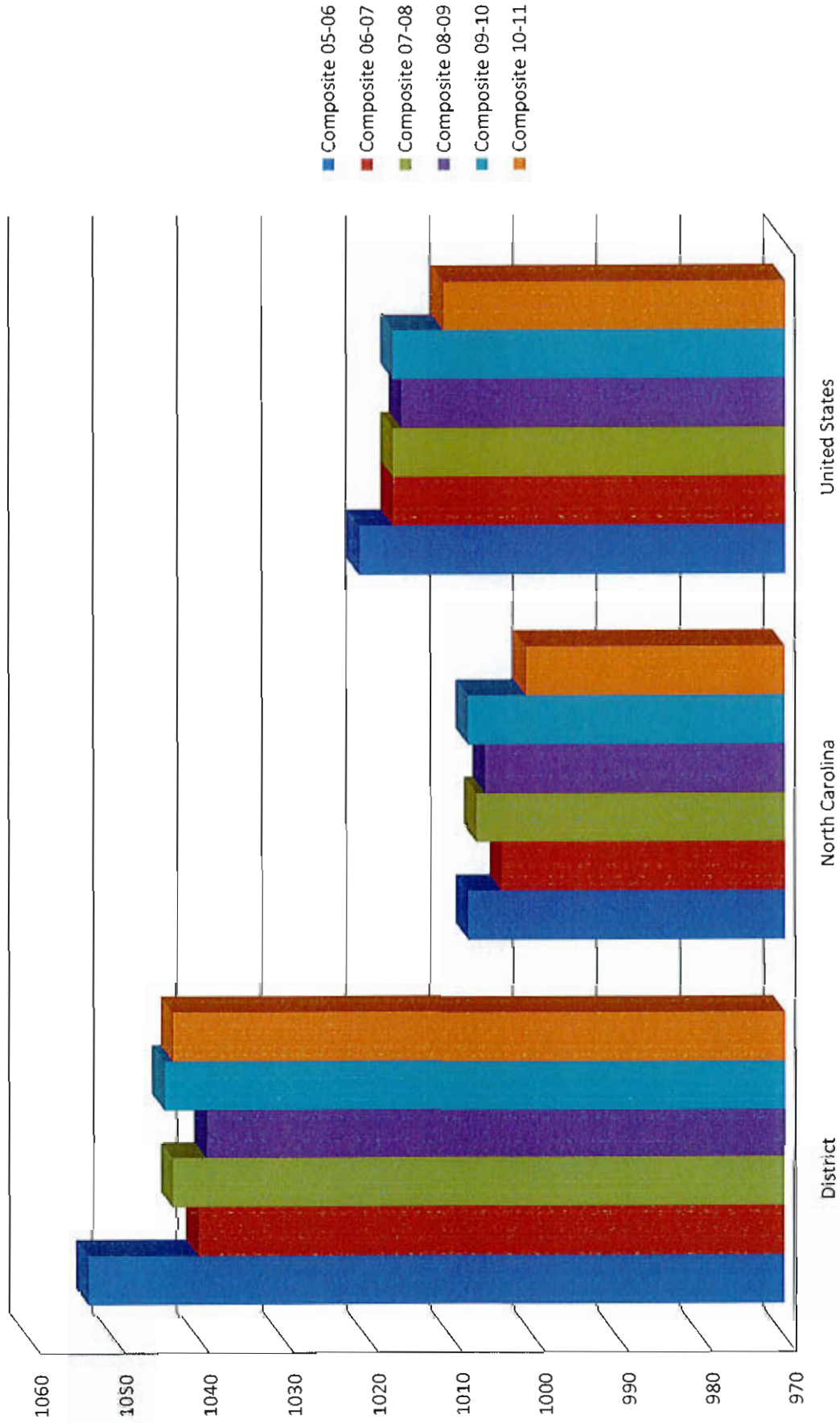
Orange County Schools Dropout Rates 2003-04 to 2009-10



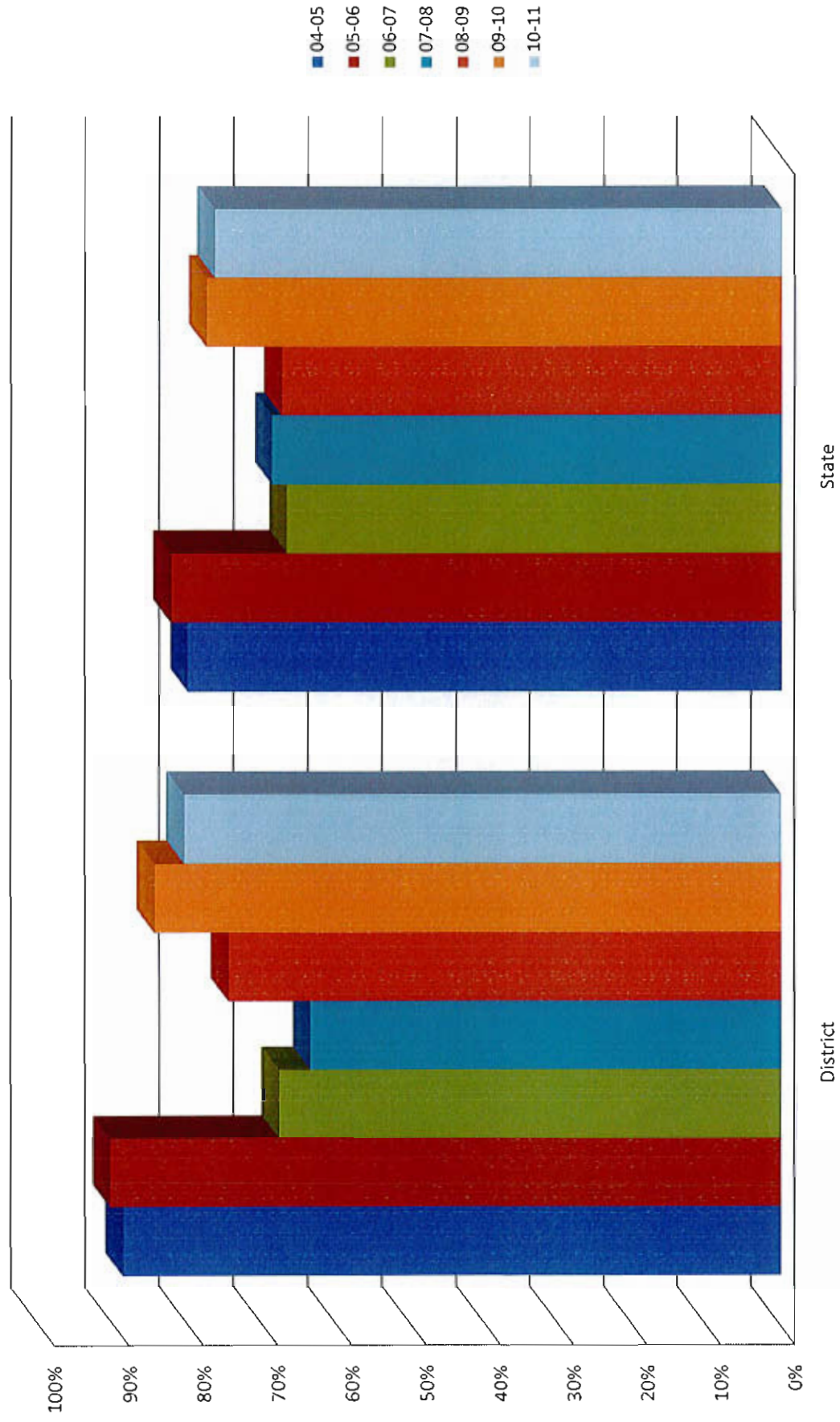
Orange County Schools Number of Dropouts 2003-04 to 2010-11



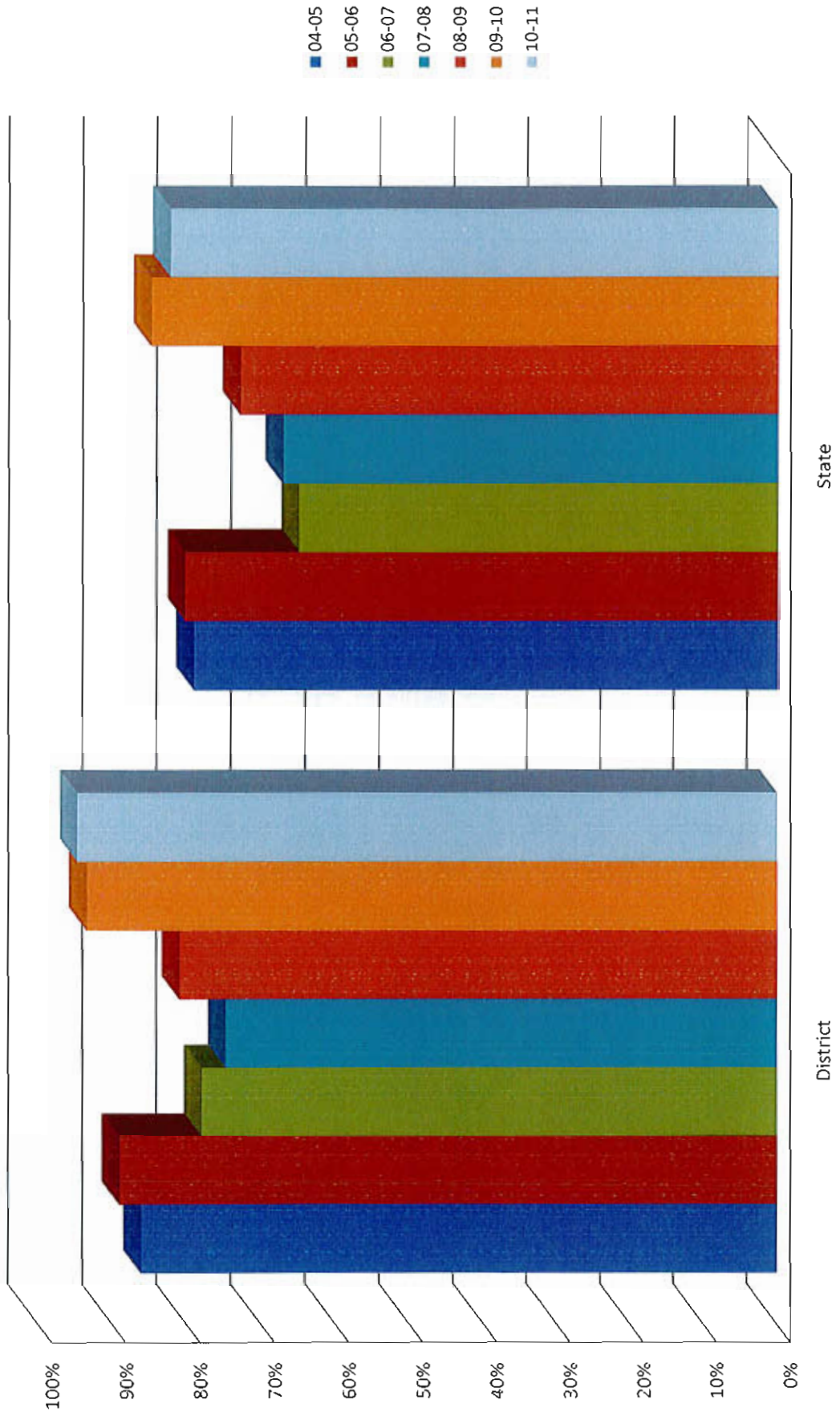
Orange County Schools SAT Comparison - Composite Scores 2005-06 to 2010-11



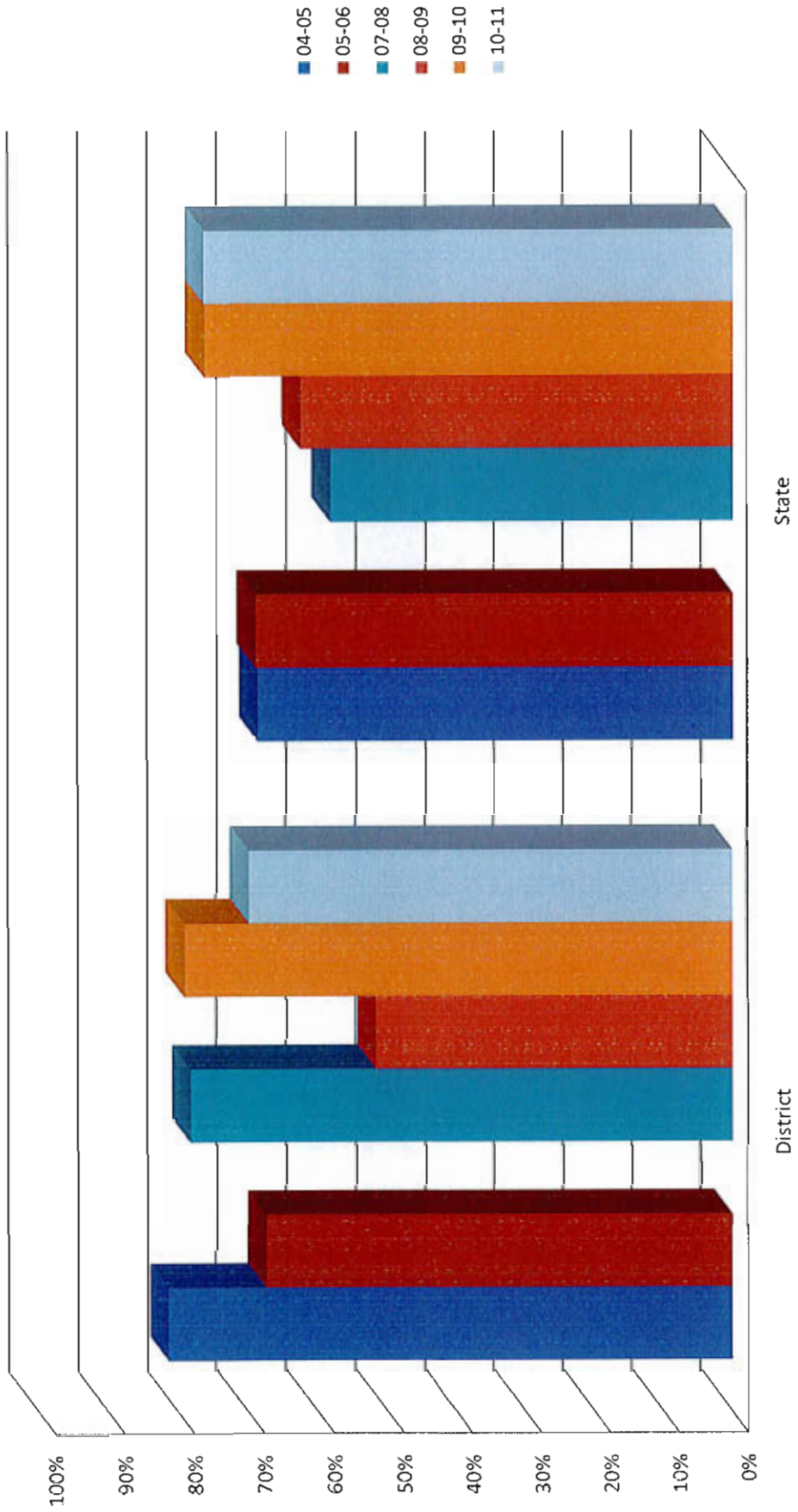
Orange County Schools Algebra I EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11



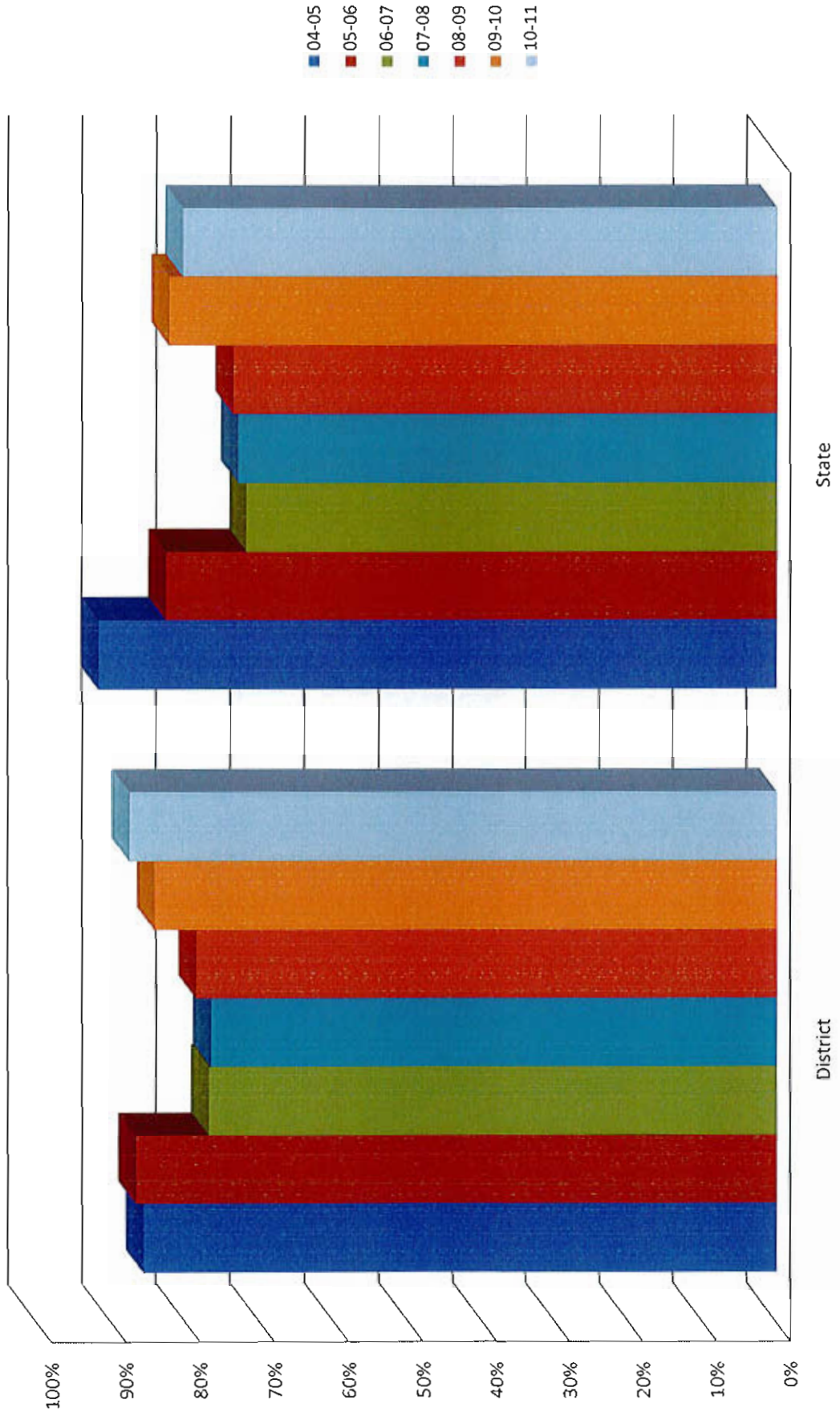
Orange County Schools Algebra II EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11



Orange County Schools
 Physical Science EOC
 2004-05 to 2010-11
 (2006-07 Field Test Administered - no results received)



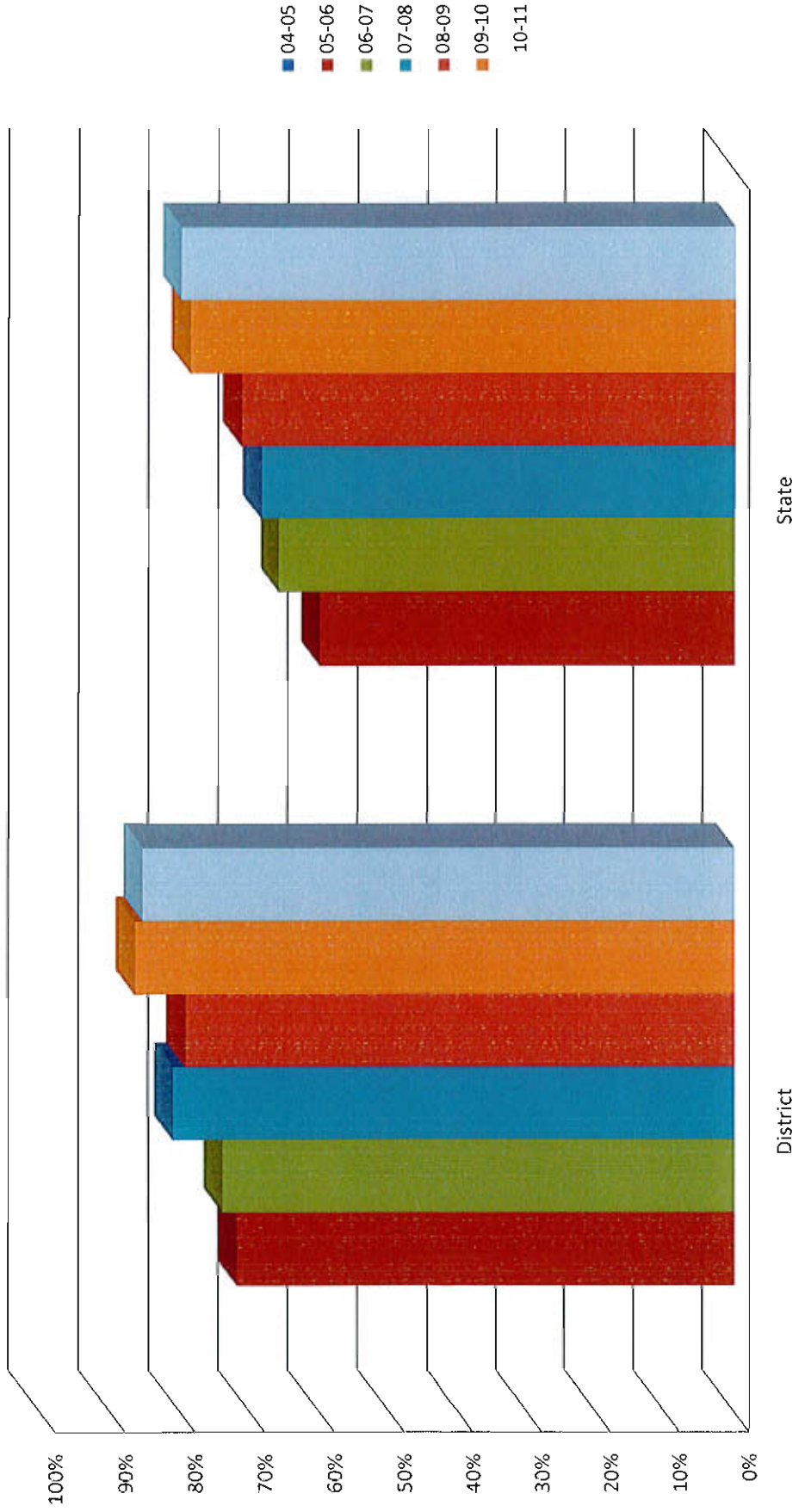
Orange County Schools English I EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11



Orange County Schools Civics & Economics EOC

2004-05 to 2010-11

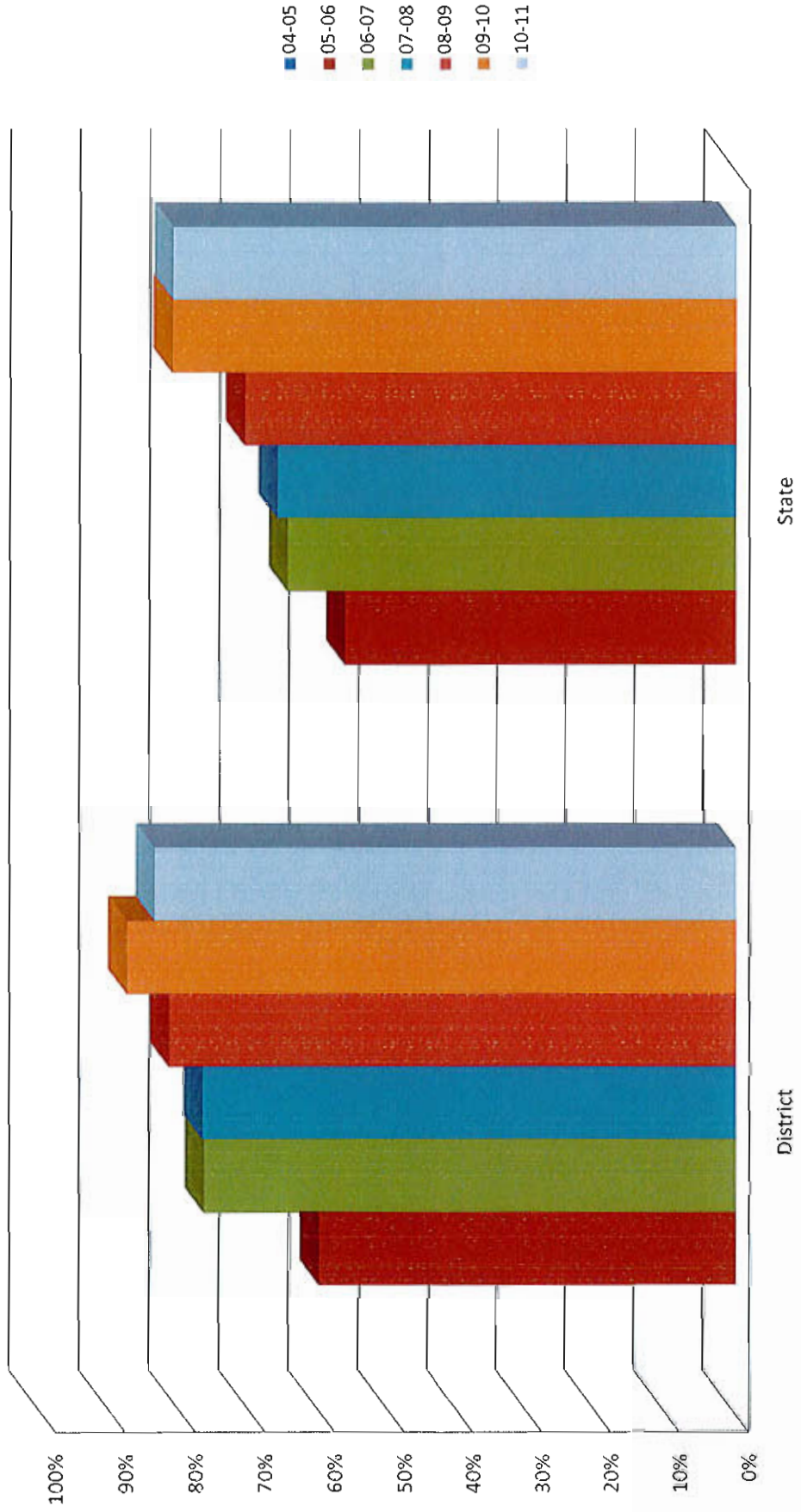
(2004-05 - Field Test Administered - No Results Received)



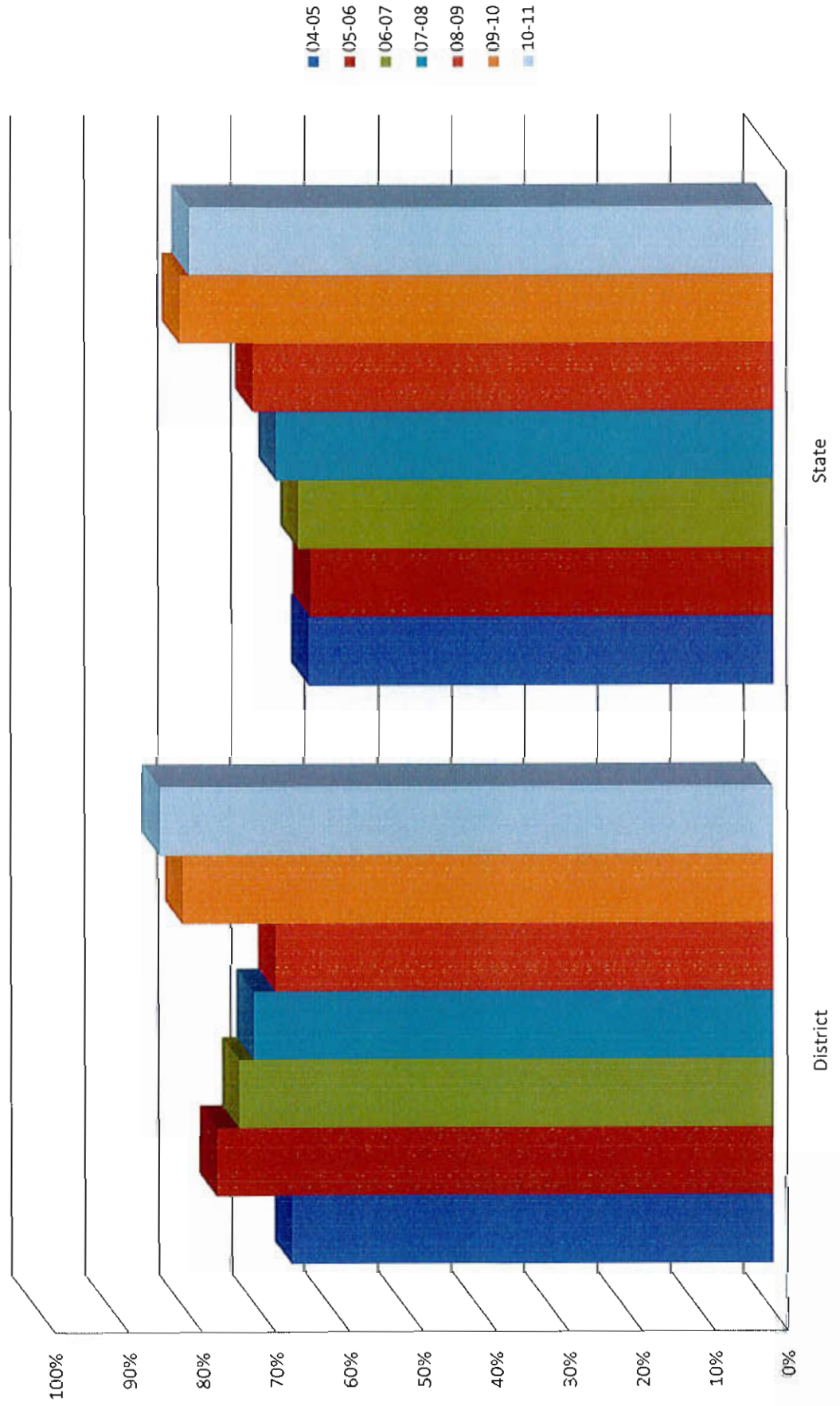
Orange County Schools U S History EOC

2004-05 to 2010-11

(2004-05 - Field Test Administered - No Results Received)



Orange County Schools Biology EOC 2004-05 to 2010-11



Orange County Schools

AP Enrollment and Student Performance: Five Year Comparison

Number of Students Enrolled in AP Courses:

Year	CRHS	OHS	District Total
2006-07	350	312	662
2007-08	479	382	861
2008-09	316	338	654
2009-10	136	403	539
2010-11	299	434	733

Number of Students Taking AP Exam:

Year	CRHS	OHS	District Total
2006-07	N/A	N/A	N/A
2007-08	270	111	381
2008-09	125	101	226
2009-10	84	104	188
2010-11	92	103	195

Number of AP Exams Administered:

Year	CRHS	OHS	District Total
2006-07	250	229	479
2007-08	287	212	499
2008-09	213	192	405
2009-10	155	211	366
2010-11	158	193	351

Number of AP Exam(s) With a Score of 3 or Higher

Year	CRHS	OHS	District Total
2006-07	136	140	276
2007-08	214	62	276
2008-09	126	104	240
2009-10	101	129	230
2010-11	114	116	230

Block Scheduling

A Report Created By Orange County Schools

November 21, 2011

Introduction

Orange County Schools made the transition from a traditional schedule to the 4 x 4 block schedule beginning in the 2006-2007 school year. In November 2001, Steven Weber, Director of Secondary Instruction, conducted Focus Group Sessions with students, classroom teachers, and building principals. "Focus group methodology is one of several tools that educators can use to generate valid information important to the advancement of programs, communities, and organizations" (Iowa State University, 2004). The information in this report provides additional insight on the 4 x 4 block schedule and highlights the perceptions of students, teachers, and principals.

Focus Group Participants

Student Focus Group:

Cedar Ridge High School Students – 7

(4 Females and 3 Males; 2 African American, 1 Multiracial, 1 Hispanic, and 3 White)

Orange High School Students – 7

(4 Females and 3 Males; 2 African American, 1 Hispanic, and 4 White)

Teacher and Administrator Focus Group:

Cedar Ridge High School Teachers – 10

(1 Arts, 1 Counselor, 2 CTE, 1 English, 1 Math, 2 Science, 1 Social Studies, and 1 World Languages)

Orange High School Teachers – 7

(1 Arts, 1 CTE, 1 Counselor, 1 English, 1 Math, 1 Science, and 1 Social Studies)

Cedar Ridge High School Principal (1)

Orange High School Principal (1)

Student Focus Group

Cedar Ridge High School and Orange High School

All students participating in the Focus Group are currently high school seniors. The students have attended high school in Orange County Schools for three and one-half years. With the exception of one student who transferred into the school system during her junior year, all students have attended high schools which operate on the block schedule since their Freshmen year.

Focus Group Questions and Answers

1. Does the block schedule support your learning style?

12 students – Yes

2 students – No

Additional Patterns:

- When we had a traditional schedule in middle school, you could get lost.
- Each class period lasts longer and this provides you with additional time to ask the teacher for help.
- You have more opportunities to get academic credit (32 chances to earn 27 credits).
- It helps my learning style in science classes.
- 9 out of twelve students said the way the additional time is used depends on your classroom teacher. Some teachers may utilize the minutes more effectively than others.

2. Are specific courses more difficult because of the block schedule?

The students in the Focus Group cited the following courses. The student's answers were consistent across both high schools.

- AP Courses (It is difficult to take an AP course in the fall and then prepare for the AP exam in the spring).
- AP English
- IB Chemistry (We have an A Day/B Day Schedule for two years).
- Some Mathematics Classes
- World Languages (There are gaps between the time you take Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3). This makes it difficult to learn a foreign language. This does not occur on a traditional schedule.

In addition to the courses mentioned above, students cited that any course can be difficult on the block schedule when you fall behind. Reasons students cited for falling behind included absenteeism, inclement weather, and the fact that every student experiences one or two courses which are more challenging based on the student's individual strengths and weaknesses.

3. What is the most positive experience you have had with the block schedule?

- Longer time to learn
- Fewer classes – makes it easier to focus on homework and to prepare for tests
- AP Yearlong was a positive experience – All AP courses should be taught as yearlong courses.
- The block schedule provides students with opportunities such as Early Graduation, Early Release, and more chances to complete and recover course credit.
- The block schedule gives you time to learn more in a single class period. You have time to begin working on your assignment and ask questions while you are still in class.

4. What are some of the benefits of the block schedule?

- Less classes per day
- If you fall behind in the fall semester, then you can retake the course in the spring rather than waiting until the following school year.
- More opportunities to take additional classes
- More opportunities to take classes at a high level (Level II and above, Honors, AP, IB)

5. What are some of the drawbacks to the block schedule?

- Pacing was the main concern expressed by all students.
- If you miss one day of class, it is similar to missing 2-3 days on the traditional schedule.
- In math, the pacing seems fast – especially if this is not your best subject.
- When we have inclement weather, an early release day, or when we miss days due to [excused and unexcused] absences it is difficult to catch up with the rest of the class. This concern was shared by students who are currently enrolled in

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standard-level courses, honors courses, and AP/IB courses.

- It is difficult to learn a foreign language on the block schedule. The pacing is very fast for these courses [All Levels] and there is a gap between the time you take Level I and Level II and additional levels.

6. Do you believe the block schedule supports a majority of your peers?

13 students – Yes

1 student – No

7. Have you participated in A Day/B Day scheduling or other variations of the block schedule?

Answers to this question included the following courses:

- AP English and AP U.S. History (Junior Year at CRHS)
- IB Courses (CRHS)
- OHS has also attempted an A Day/B Day schedule with some courses, but none of the students interviewed had participated in the courses.

8. Have you ever taken an AP course? How does block scheduling impact a student who is enrolled in an AP course?

- Students who enrolled in AP courses indicated that all AP courses should either be offered as yearlong courses or should only be offered during the spring semester.
- Some of the AP students admitted that they were not motivated to prepare for the AP exam in the spring, attend afterschool AP exam prep sessions, or study on their own, if they were not enrolled in the AP course in the spring.
- Some AP students admitted that they have late night study sessions, due to the rigor of AP courses. Some students believe that AP courses should be offered over the course of one year, since they are college level courses offered to high school students.
- Some of the AP students indicated that if you are an athlete and you miss a lab or class, you may fall behind in AP courses. They indicated that the pacing is extremely fast and it is difficult to miss class due to an away game or a state playoff game.

9. Do you have anything else you would like to share about your experience(s) as a high school student in a school that operates on a block schedule?

- The block schedule gives you time to listen to a lecture, complete a group project, and begin your homework.
- Do not eliminate the “Plus Period.” This allows us to meet with our teachers and ask questions. This helps students who are struggling to pass a course and it helps advanced students.
- I took AP Biology. The block schedule allowed me to take an additional advanced science course.
- I think the block schedule helps us prepare for college (semester courses and longer class periods).
- I enrolled at OHS during my junior year. Prior to enrolling in school, I had attended home school and a charter school. I did not have the same number of credits as other students who were entering their junior year. The block schedule allowed me multiple opportunities to earn credits and I will graduate [on time] in the spring with my classmates/cohort.

Teacher and Administrator Focus Group Cedar Ridge High School and Orange High School

All participants were selected by the building principals. Each department was represented by a staff member. In some cases, the department chair represented the department. The teachers, counselors, and principals shared their perspectives and in some cases shared the perspectives of their department. This report provides insight into the way teachers, counselors, and principals feel about the block schedule. The 2011-2012 school year marks the sixth year that Orange County Schools has operated on a block schedule at Cedar Ridge High School and Orange High School.

Teacher and Administrator Focus Group:

Cedar Ridge High School Teachers

(1 Arts, 1 Counselor, 2 CTE, 1 English, 1 Math, 2 Science, 1 Social Studies, and 1 World Languages)

Orange High School Teachers

(1 Arts, 1 CTE, 1 Counselor, 1 English, 1 Math, 1 Science, and 1 Social Studies)

Cedar Ridge High School Principal (1)

Orange High School Principal (1)

1. How has the block schedule impacted teaching in your school?

- The block schedule has forced teachers to change instructional strategies.
- The time frame requires teachers to meet in a PLC and identify the “most essential” skills and concepts.
- The schedule allows for Introduction or Foundations courses in mathematics and English.
- In science and CTE courses, teachers are able to introduce the lesson, provide students with an example from a video or demonstration, conduct a lab, and review key skills and concepts prior to the end of the 90 minute class.
- Each teacher is responsible for fewer students per semester.
- The block schedule allows students to retake courses.
- CTE teachers are split over the block schedule versus the traditional schedule.
- World Languages would prefer yearlong classes (both schools).

- “There is no way you can teach the new math standards [Common Core State Standards] on a traditional schedule.” The standards are designed for longer periods with students.
- It took several teachers a couple of years to adjust to the pacing and the shorter time with students, but we have figured out how to teach on the block schedule.
- “I cannot imagine returning to the traditional schedule” – a majority of the teachers echoed this opinion.

2. What are some of the benefits of the block schedule?

- Increased opportunities to graduate on time as well as graduate early
- More one-on-one time with students, due to the extended bell schedule
- More course options
- Similar to a college schedule
- Increased enrollment in all Arts courses
- Time for extended learning opportunities (i.e., projects, labs, debates, group projects, technology integration, hands-on learning, and guest speakers)
- Decrease in the dropout rate

3. What are some of the drawbacks to the block schedule?

- World Languages – It is easier to learn a World Language on a yearlong schedule.
- There is a loss of continuity between Level I, Level II, and beyond in World Languages classes. It is similar to students falling behind in core classes during the summer months.
- Math teachers also expressed a concern over the loss of continuity between courses (same concern as World Languages teachers).
- AP courses
The main problem is scheduling. The College Board requires that students take the AP exam in the spring, but the exam dates are much earlier than the end of the school year. Students who take the AP exam in the fall may not perform as well on the test in the spring or may not feel motivated to take the AP exam.
- The block schedule is tough for students with a short attention span. Some students cannot sit in the same class for 90 minutes. There is no perfect schedule for all students/learners.

- Theatre and Visual Arts teachers have experienced combined levels within their classes.
- Some teachers expressed that it is difficult to build student/teacher relationships during one semester. One teacher said, “This makes me a less productive teacher.”

4. Do most teachers in your school like teaching on the block schedule?

- The block schedule gives students fewer classes to focus on.
- Teachers have fewer students and this allows for more time to grade papers and provide written or verbal feedback to students.
- There is more time for hands-on activities (This works well with CTE courses).
- A majority of the staff indicated that their co-workers prefer the block schedule versus the traditional schedule.
- While World Languages is difficult to teach on the block schedule, we would not have Spanish V on a traditional schedule.
- High school counselors like the block schedule because it gives students the opportunity to develop a stronger transcript which will support college and career readiness.

5. Have you made any modifications to the 4 x 4 block schedule?

If yes, which course schedules have been modified and why?

- A couple of years ago, we tried the A Day/B Day with yearlong AP English and AP U.S. History. It was not well received by our teachers or students. (OHS)
- Yearlong English and Math courses (both high schools)
- IB A Day/B Day (Yearlong) (CRHS)
English/History and Science/Math
- AP English Language/AP U.S. History A Day/B Day (CRHS)

6. Do you believe the block schedule supports student achievement?

Why or why not?

- Multiple opportunities for students – Each student is a unique individual.
- Credit Recovery, Early Graduation (Positive Options for Students and Families)

- Reduced Dropout Rate
- The four year graduation rate has increased since moving to the block schedule.
- The students who take AP courses are being impacted by the pacing and the amount of homework required for a college level course.
- One teacher noted, “There would be more homework for AP students on a six/seven period schedule.”
- The block schedule allows students to focus on their strengths/interests.
- The schedule can be challenging to students with a short attention span or students who are struggling to understand the course content.
- The block schedule is more manageable for students and teachers than the traditional schedule.

7. Would you prefer to return to the traditional 6 or 7 period schedule?

16 – No (Teachers and Both High School Principals)

1 – Yes (Some CTE Teachers – It depends on the course)

2 – Undecided (World Languages Teachers and Arts Teachers – some Arts courses)

8. Are you aware of specific courses which are difficult to teach on the block schedule?

The following courses were mentioned.

- AP Art likes the block schedule.
- AP courses (Due to Exam Schedule)
- AP English courses
- Band
- Chemistry
- Chorus
- Some CTE courses (no specific courses were cited by the Focus Group)
- Standard Level English courses

- World Languages courses

9. Do you believe the Common Core State Standards and the NC Essential Standards can be taught on the block schedule?

Every teacher agreed that the new standards can and should be taught on a block schedule. They indicated that the new standards will encourage depth versus breadth and the 90 minute schedule is ideal for teaching in depth. Some of the teachers comments are highlighted below:

- English (Yes)
- Instrumental cannot be taught on a traditional schedule (Yes)
- Math cannot be taught on a traditional schedule. (Yes)
- Science and the Literacy Standards (Yes)
- Social Studies (Yes)
- World Languages – While we would prefer to teach our courses on a yearlong schedule, there are too many student benefits to change the schedule back to a traditional schedule. It will be difficult to teach the new NC Essential Standards on the block schedule.

10. Does the block schedule make it more difficult to graduate from high school or is the level of difficulty the same regardless of a school's scheduling practices?

- Our graduation rate indicates that the block schedule supports students.
- Every teacher indicated that they could identify more than one student who had benefitted from the block schedule and who graduated with his/her cohort due to the additional opportunities for credit recovery and other options.
- When students fail a course in the fall, they have the opportunity to retake the same course in the spring. This allows students to retake the course while it is fresh on their mind and it provides students with opportunities to stay with their cohort (This also has an impact on self-esteem and motivation to graduate).
- Teachers indicated that the block schedule is ideal for the new standards that will go into effect in 2012-2013.
- Every teacher indicated that the block schedule is more student-friendly and it supports students at both ends of the learning spectrum (struggling – advanced).

**BLOCK SCHEDULING STAFFING ANALYSIS
2005-2011**

(These numbers represent any change in teacher allotments since
implementation of block scheduling)

	Orange High			Cedar Ridge		
	Electives	Core	Membership	Electives	Core	Membership
2005-06	19	35	1,110	18	41	980
2006-07	23	40	1,143	19	39	1,018
2010-11	25	41	1,206	19	38	1,059

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Block Schedule

(From DPI Website)

Advantages to Teachers

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

Organization of the school day

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

Delivery of Instruction

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

Advantages to Students

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

Organization of the school day

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

Delivery of Instruction

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

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

Special Advantages for Foreign Languages

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

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

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

Figure 3: Opportunities for extended studies in one language

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

Disadvantages to Teachers

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

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

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

Disadvantages to Students

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

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

Concerns for Foreign Languages

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

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

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

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

