

# EDUCATION

# BREAKING DOWN THE BLOCK SCHEDULE

Structuring the school day requires careful planning and scheduling. Each student needs to get their core classes, electives and other graduation requirements fulfilled in order to reach the day when they walk down the aisle to "Pomp and Circumstance."

Every spring students consider the classes they will take the following fall, while counselors and administrators spend endless hours trying to coordinate the perfect schedule for each future graduate.

There are several ways to create schedules. One form of arrangement is known as block scheduling, which can be broken down into full block and modified block. In theory, a block schedule provides extended class time within a given period. Instead of a typical set up of 50-60 minutes per class, there might be 80 or 90 minutes per class, allowing the teacher and student more time to engage in learning more effectively, instead of rushing through lessons.

In a full block schedule, an entire academic year-long course is taught within one semester. The class is typically 90 minutes long, meets every day and moves through subject matter at a quicker pace than a non-blocked class. Students usually take only four classes a semester within a full block schedule so they can concentrate their focus.

Grading periods are broken down into four quarters, that when combined form a semes-

ter. A full block class is completed after one semester.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this system. One of the benefits is that students only take about two to three core classes, allowing them time to focus and gain a stronger grasp on specific subject matter. Students might feel less overwhelmed when just having a few required classes versus six or eight. In addition, more class time is allotted for learning. However, during a full block schedule, students often feel hurried when tremendous amounts of information are handed down within such a small time frame.

Teachers sometimes experience the sensation of "shoving it down their throats" when attempting to cover a year's worth of studying within a semester, despite the additional seat time in class settings. More importantly, this arrangement results in students potentially going half a year without a subject, such as math, which makes the continuity of learning and preparation for certain standardized tests more challenging.

Another form of block scheduling is known as modified block. In this format a course is taken over an entire



By Vicki Isacowitz

## ON THE CHALKBOARD

year meeting every other day with an extended time period similar to the 80-90 minute classes within a full block schedule. Modified block

scheduling is comparable to college programs in the respect that classes meet a few times a week instead of every day.

This promotes responsibility by giving students opportunities to budget their time when attempting to complete assignments. Having a day in between classes is helpful to spread out the homework load by dedicating one night to one day of classes and the second night to the others.

Think of it as "A" days and "B" days. On "A" days, a student might have math, history and Spanish, while "B" days are consumed with English, science and art. The homework due for "A" day classes can wait until a "B" day for completion, and vice versa. The confusing aspect is one of a modified block schedule's downfalls. Students and teachers can forget which day is what, resulting in being unprepared for the correct class.

Once students and teachers get through their bewilderment, this schedule actually works well.

— Vicki Isacowitz is a secondary English teacher who has been educating students since 1996. She is co-founder of *Clever Minds Educational Services*, providing tutoring for students in grades K-12. Call (530) 582-1707 or e-mail [vicki@cleverminds.org](mailto:vicki@cleverminds.org).