



Block Scheduling: An Evaluation of Outcomes and Impact

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Introduction

In 1994, the National Commission on Time and Learning published *Prisoners of Time* and, based on their investigation of the issue of time and instructional effectiveness, the report proposed the use of block scheduling as a means for the implementation of more flexible uses of time. A report by the National Association of School Principals, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (1996), also recommended block scheduling as a strategy for rearranging the school day in order to establish longer periods of uninterrupted time for student learning and instruction. Since the publication of these reports, studies indicate that more than 30 percent of all high schools in America have adopted some form of block scheduling (Hottenstein, 1998).

Mathews (1997), in *Alternative Schedules: A Block to Success*, suggests that not all schools will benefit from block scheduling arrangements and stresses the need for more rigorous studies and long-term assessments to substantiate claims of effectiveness of block scheduling. Likewise, Bevevino, Snodgrass, Adams, and Dengel (1999, p. 6), stated that "because of its recent surge in implementation, the impact of alternative scheduling has yet to be

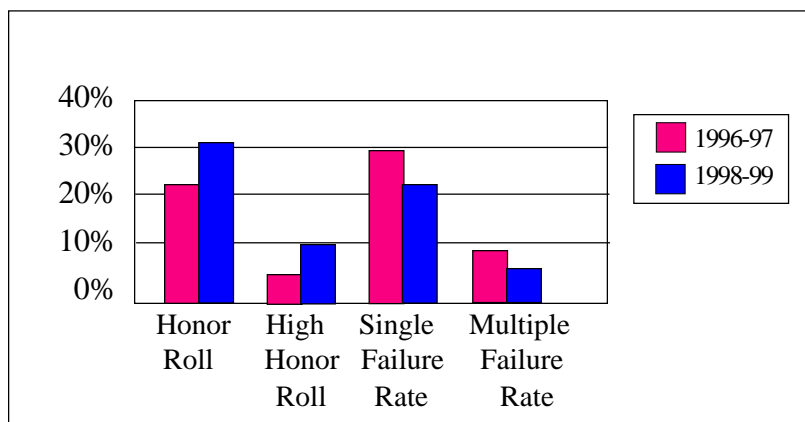
validated by a firm empirical research base." The results of the current study should begin to address these concerns and provide insights as to the potency of block scheduling as a catalyst for positive change.

Methodology

This study is based on the compilation of data, both routine school information and constituencies' opinions, collected through surveys and personal interviews, at three districts where 4x4 block scheduling was implemented at the beginning of the 1997-98 school year. Data were gathered from the 1996-97 school year to serve as baseline measure for comparisons with similar data obtained after the implementation

of block scheduling. The three sites involved in the study are all located in New Jersey and, by way of settings, one urban, one suburban, and one rural school participated in the study.

At all three sites, the focus of the investigations was to determine the extent to which the goals established in conjunction with the implementation of block scheduling were being achieved and progress was being made in attaining expected outcomes. Those anticipated outcomes included: (a) changes in instructional approaches used by teachers; (b) changes in the curriculum experienced by students; (c) improved student achievement, indicated by increases on standardized test scores and honor roll status and decreases in failure



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rates; (d) improvements in areas related to student decorum and behavior issues; and (e) teacher, student, and parent satisfaction with the scheduling initiative.

Results

Student Grades. Overall, the percentage of students making the honor roll increased at the three sites by 9 percent (from 22 percent to 31 percent). The number of students making high honor roll, or principal's honor roll, increased from approximately 6 percent to 9 percent. The percentage of students receiving a single D or F for a final course grade decreased by 7 percent (from 29 percent to 22 percent). Also, there was a decrease in the number of students experiencing multiple failures, from 8 percent to 5 percent, in spite of the fact that most students took 8 instead of 7 courses under block scheduling. Finally, more students completed Advanced Placement courses and successfully passed the AP tests.

Achievement Test Scores. Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) were monitored. The average combined SAT score increased by 14 points, from 975 to 989, from the 1996-1997 school year to the 1998-1999 school year. The percentage of juniors passing all three sections of the HSPT increased from 67 percent in the 1996-1997 school year to 73 percent in the 1998-1999 school year.

Student Decorum and Attendance. Across schools, the number of suspensions remained at 2.1 percent per month. While monitoring the number of suspensions proved inconclusive, it is important to note that there was a significant decrease (of about 50 percent) in the number of detentions. The average daily student attendance increased from 92.4 percent to 94.1 over a period of two years under block scheduling.

Opinion Surveys. Overall, the percentage of each constituency that

responded "yes" when questioned "I would like to see block scheduling continue" was quite high. Approximately 80 percent of teachers, 70 percent of students, and 62 percent of the parents responding to the survey agreed with this statement. From the data collected across all three sites, several common themes emerged. Both teachers and students stated in surveys and focus groups that instructional practices have changed as a result of block scheduling. Most agreed that more varied learning activities were taking place in the classroom, with teachers estimating a minimum of three different activities occurring during a typical block period. A majority of teachers and students also agreed that the block format allows for more independent and collaborative hands-on projects and that students have become more involved in the classroom activities.

Conclusions

Overall, the three sites displayed many similarities in the changes experienced as a result of the implementation of block scheduling:

- Teachers present a greater variety of activities in the classroom under the block schedule; teachers estimate the minimal number of activities per period at three.
- With respect to standardized test scores, the average test scores increased after the implementation

of block scheduling.

- The percentage of students on the high/ principal's honor roll and honor roll increased and failure rates decreased.
- The number of detentions assigned decreased about 50 percent after the implementation of the block; however, the number of suspensions remained stable.
- The majority of teachers, students, and parents are satisfied with the implementation of block scheduling at their school and with the changes in the curriculum they are experiencing.

References

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