

COMPILATION: Block schedules and traditional, with Modeling Instruction

Date: Mon, 4 Mar 2002

From: Kent Ellis <kemarble@HOTMAIL.COM>

At Flagstaff H.S. we've been on the block schedule for about seven years, and are now changing back to a six period day, some modified version of the six-per-day or a modified A/B-block schedule, due to budget constraints.

I've known nothing but the 85-minute period, four periods per day, since I've been teaching. I'm looking forward to the year-long class because I think I can finally get through all the mechanics as well as enrich the class with the traditional 2nd semester topics. As it now stands, with the two-term year, the spring term seems nearly worthless. We have more absences due to ... whatever, there are more standardized test days, there are more extra-curricular activities, spring fever sets into (me and) my students, post spring-break seems to be a time when my students' brains have shut down if not fallen out, and the AP classes - why should they even bother after the test in May?

I don't count the students' seat hours any more than I calculate my income versus the cost of living in Flagstaff. I know if I do, I'll only get depressed. I'm hopeful my students learn what they can in the time we give them. I hope and feel that I'm getting better at it; the modeling is working.

Date: Mon, 4 Mar 2002

From: gheri fouts <gfouts@PIXI.COM>

I am also on the block schedule here in Hawaii. Since this is new to me, I find it very rewarding. I can see that teaching content and facts just does not work well with the lightning speed of fewer meetings and longer periods, but *getting them to think and become deeply involved in the topic seems to be my purpose and I feel it is working much better in this type of scheduling.* I had more students this term score over 60% on the FCI than ever before. Perhaps it was just a lucky twist, but I think the block scheduling had much to do with it. And they started at an all time low average pretest of about 17%. A couple of them did not improve at all, but many of them started thinking formally for the first time, I am sure.

Date: Thu, 7 Mar 2002

From: David Wirth <Dwirth6@aol.com>

It's interesting to note the trend that's taking place with the 4x4 block schedule around the country. My high school (Tolleson High School) also switched to the 4x4 schedule about 6 years years ago, used it up until last year when they decided to go back to the traditional schedule. The switch back was made by the district administrators without the support of the teachers. The reason given for the change was mostly due to the extra costs associated with the schedule.

I've switched schools this year and am teaching at a school with six 50-minute classes again. It's difficult getting adjusted to this time frame and getting to the same depth with the students. By the time any quality discourse gets started, its time to put the whiteboards away. I'm sure many of you have been using modeling with the 50 minute period for years.

Any suggestions on how to get to the quality discourse faster? I need a higher slope on the quality of discourse to time graph.

Date: Thu, 7 Mar 2002

From: Matt Greenwolfe <matt_greenwolfe@CaryAcademy.org>

David,

One thing that's worked for me is to *assign groups ahead of time and write the student's names on the boards along with their specific whiteboard assignment* - which problem or part of a problem. Before class, I set them all out on the tables. *As soon as the students arrive in class, they find their white board and get started.* While they're working, *I walk around and check to see that they have at least attempted all of the problems for homework, and that accomplishes attendance as well.* This way we use every minute of class.

It has also helped to *have them do white boards one day, then set them aside and discuss them the next day.* Of course, I have to have lots of white boards for either of these ideas to work. I'm thinking about building some caddies on wheels next year so each class will have a place to put their own boards and I can just wheel them out at the start of class.

We also have a longer period one day per week, which I try to use for experiments but sometimes use for whiteboarding as well. (Each class meets for three 45 minute periods and one 95 minute period per week.)

Date: Thu, 7 Mar 2002

From: Fran Poodry <FPoodry@AOL.COM>

David Wirth writes:

<< I'm sure many of you have been using modeling with the 50-minute period for years. Any suggestions on how to get to the quality discourse faster? >>

My current school has the shortest class periods of any I have worked in: 40 minute periods, 9 periods/day. I have resigned myself to moving very slowly through the curriculum. Ver---r---r--
y Slo---o---o---w---ly.

Sometimes I put a timer on the whiteboarding...*when they know they have a limited time to put a problem on a whiteboard, they tend to work faster and then there is more time for discourse.*