

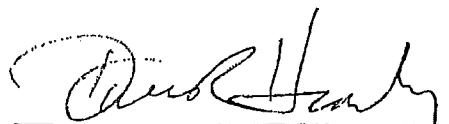
Teacher's Opinions and Attitudes  
Toward Block Scheduling

by

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' attitudes and concerns regarding block scheduling measured by the researcher's instrument. The research instrument was developed to measure teachers' perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling based on a review of the literature. It was administered during the 2008-2009 school year to approximately 60 middle and high school teachers who are employed at four neighboring schools in Wisconsin, which are all on block scheduling and are of similar size and population. The researcher developed a questionnaire that was placed in school mailboxes. Seventy-five percent of staff returned the questionnaire and participated in the survey.

The advantage indicated most often was the value of more learning time with students. The disadvantage indicated most often was the amount of time that is wasted in block scheduling. The findings of this study indicated that even though the balance between advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling were equivalent, the attitudes of teachers were favorable toward block scheduling. The research findings showed a significant relationship between the subject matter taught and the attitudes toward block scheduling. In addition, the research findings also indicated a relationship between the ability to prepare a variety of learning methods and the attitudes toward block scheduling.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

To block or not to block is a question many schools across the United States find themselves asking. Schools are examining ways to improve student learning, to increase academic success, and to enhance the school climate. Block scheduling is an educational method used by schools to increase student achievement. Block scheduling was designed to increase teacher and student interaction within the classroom, altering the ways that teachers worked and students learned. This type of scheduling enables a school to offer more classes in a school year compared to the traditional seven-period day.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

It is a difficult decision for a school to change its program schedule from the traditional 50-minute classes to a 90-minute block schedule. It is a challenge for teachers and students to adapt to a new schedule when they have been comfortable teaching and learning the traditional way.

There are many types of educational programs that aim to provide students with the best teaching method possible. Schools throughout the United States, in dramatically increasing numbers, are adopting a form of alternative schedule. Adopting block scheduling is one of the methods educators have used to enable students to reach their potential. The debate over a traditional seven or eight period day versus block scheduling is a controversial issue in many school districts. Lawrence and McPherson (2000), state that in the 1980's and continuing into the 1990's, teachers and administrators were criticized for their ineffective use of school time. In 1983, educators began to examine alternatives that might result in higher student achievement when a report entitled, "A

Nation at Risk” issued by the National Education Commission, reported that American students were academically lagging behind their counterparts in a number of other industrialized nations (Queen, 2000). As a way of seeking improvement, many educators came to see a need for the restructuring of schools and their schedules. This restructuring, intended to improve student learning, included the formal rearranging of the use of time in schools. The recommendation was to use block scheduling to give teachers the time to engage students in active instruction. During the 1990’s, the number of high schools that examined alternative schedules as possible ways for improving teaching and learning increased. According to Queen (2000), from the years 1992 to 1995, the use of block schedules among United States high schools rose from 4% to over 40%. Block scheduling promotes the idea that the instructional time in schools may be maximized.

Block scheduling is defined as a restructuring of the school day into classes longer than the traditional 50-minute period classes (Adams & Salvaterra, 1997). Shortt and Thayer (1999) identified two high school scheduling configurations that are most commonly identified as block scheduling. These schedules are usually called A-B or alternating day and 4 X 4 or semester block. Classes on the A-B schedule generally meet every other day for the entire school year for 90 minute blocks. Those on a 4 X 4 schedule generally met every other day for 90 minutes for one semester or for 90 days. Teachers teach three courses each semester, and students enroll in four courses each semester. Block scheduling organizes a course around one semester of 90-minute classes instead of two semesters of 50-minute classes.

According to Gruber and Onwuegbuzie (2001), the development of the concept of block scheduling began in the early 1960's by J. Loyd Trump. Trump's idea for a more instructional session eliminated rigid class schedules with sessions that lasted in length from 20 minutes to 100 minutes. During the 1980's, more and more educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders began to perceive the school schedule as an under-utilized resource that had the potential to improve student outcomes. The report of the National Commission on Time and Learning (1994) declared that the future of public education depended on the effective use of school time. According to Gruber and Onwuegbuzie, block scheduling has become increasingly popular in the past decade, however, only a few researchers have looked at the effect on academic achievement. For schools that have been using some form of block scheduling, it is important to examine the intention and direction of these alternative models (Queen, 2000). Queen found that a growing percentage of teachers do not follow pacing guides when using block schedules. A number of principals and teachers have limited the effectiveness of block schedules.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Many school districts that have adopted block scheduling are trying to determine the effectiveness of the change (Lare, Jablonski & Salvaterra, 2002). Was the change worth the effort? The purpose of this study is to examine four school districts and their teacher's perceptions of the overall effectiveness of block scheduling. The questionnaire will look at teachers' attitudes toward block scheduling. It will specifically assess the benefits and problems that educators have experienced, will explore the modifications teachers made in transitioning to block scheduling, and will ascertain their overall opinions on the effectiveness of block scheduling. The results of the study will be made

available to administrators and educators to aid in determining whether block scheduling is beneficial to a district. The results from this study will hopefully aid other school districts in determining whether to adopt a block schedule model if they are seriously considering its adaptation.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### *Background for the study*

The traditional secondary school schedule often tries to accomplish too much in too little time (McCoy, 1998). This time constraint affects both the teacher and the student. Teachers struggle with too many students in classes, have limited time for planning, and are required to prepare for multiple courses. Students spend too much time between classes, deal with a large number of books and supplies, and manage numerous class assignments and requirements.

According to McCoy (1998), time problems in schools have caused educators to look at alternatives to the traditional scheduling. The use of time has been a focus for change in the educational system on education reform (Trenta & Newman, 2002). Block scheduling is the most prominent option to date for restructuring efforts (McCoy). Block scheduling has been shown to be effective and successful when all primary stakeholders are involved in the process, schools provide staff development time for teaching strategies, and the implementation is constantly evaluated. As Creamean and Horvath (2002) state, "The idea of block scheduling is clearly one of the fastest growing and most successful restructuring initiatives in American schools today" (p. 15).

Block scheduling is generally introduced at the junior and senior high level (Northeast and Islands Regional Education Lab, 1998). It allows flexibility of instructional activities. The main goal of the block scheduling program is to increase student academic performance. Along with increased academic performance, block scheduling programs hope to improve innovative teaching methods that address multiple

learning styles, improve the school environment, and increase student and teacher relationships. According to Trenta and Newman (2002), there are a number of variations to block scheduling. Schools can adapt block scheduling to meet their unique circumstances. The two most common block scheduling programs are the 4X4 schedule and the A-B schedule.

According to Queen (2000), the structure of scheduling in high schools remained essentially the same during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. J. Lloyd Trump proposed eliminating the traditional high school schedule and implementing classes of different lengths of time depending on the instructional needs of students. Trump's proposal became known as the "Trump Plan", which allowed classes to meet for a 40-minute lecture, a 100-minute lab, and a 20-minute help session each week. Other classes could be shortened periods of 20 or 30 minutes. Teachers using the Trump Plan were encouraged to experiment with a variety of teaching strategies. Some varied instructional strategies include cooperative learning, the inquiry method, group discussion, concept development, simulations, and seminars.

Any change in the structural teaching climate can be challenging to educators. When educators began to examine alternatives to higher student achievement, many came to see the restructuring of schools, including their schedules, as a way to seek improvement (Queen, 2000). Some educators resist any change in the schedule, even when the traditional schedule is showing concerns. As Hackmann (2004) states, "The adoption of block scheduling has significant instruction implications, but some teachers may resist changing their classroom practices because they do not fully understand how longer time frames could facilitate learning" (p. 700). Teachers are confronted with the

hard reality of figuring out how to use the blocks effectively. The National Commission on Time and Learning (1994) published a report titled, "Prisoners of Time", which warned that schools must be reinvented to focus on learning, not time. The Commission recommended using block schedule to give students time for active learning. Since its rise in popularity in the late 1980's, it was recognized that the traditional school structure does not allow time for individual instruction, extended laboratory work, or for remediation and enrichment. Block scheduling was seen as a way for teachers to concentrate more on individual students and a way to increase academic performance.

The evaluation process to block scheduling is difficult to define quantify when looking at academic achievement. Lare, Jablonski and Salvaterra (2002) reported measures that might be used in evaluating academic achievement, including grade point averages, honor roll numbers, and statewide test scores. Single evaluation measures or combinations of several evaluation measures have been computed to calculate changes in achievement that occurred following implementation of block scheduling. According to Lawrence and McPherson (2000), some studies reported improvements in overall grades, while others have reported an increase in failure rates or declining standardized test scores. Numerous district reports on block scheduling that show any changes in SAT scores have been reported anecdotally. Most of these district reports show that in the long run, SAT scores remain about the same.

According to Thomas and O'Connell (1997), block scheduling must be accepted by all who have an interest in the educational process – teachers, administrators, parents, the community, and students in order for it to be effective. Parents, teachers, administrators, and community are on one side of the educational process and students

are on the other side. It is just as important to study the adversarial relationship between the providers of education and the receivers, as this contributes to the effectiveness in education.

Hackmann (2004) reported that block scheduling is implemented for numerous reasons, which include course flexibility, enhancing the quality of educational experiences for students, improving instructional strategies, providing more time for learning, improving the school climate, stimulating curriculum changes, and addressing staffing concerns or needs. He also indicated that surveys show block scheduling improves teacher morale, increase student satisfaction, and enhance the quality of the relationship between teachers and students.

#### *Advantages of block scheduling*

Block scheduling offers many advantages. In the educational efforts to restructure schools and their schedules, Zepeda and Mayers (2006), recognized that this effort emerged as a means to accomplish the following: include more “hard subjects” in the curriculum; increase graduation requirements; implement more rigorous standards; reorganize the day through alternate schedules; and promote smaller learning communities. As a result of the restructuring effort, block scheduling has been given credit for reducing the number of students teachers must prepare for and interact with; reducing the number of classes, assignments, tests, and projects that students must complete; reducing the fragmentation of traditional schedules; providing teachers with more time that allows and encourages the use of active teaching strategies and greater student involvement; and allowing students variable amounts of time.

According to Gruber and Onwuegbuzie (2001), restructuring of the school day into blocked periods of 90 minutes increased student satisfaction. Students feel overwhelmed with academic material, class rules, and homework assignments in short instructional periods. They have fewer classes, quizzes, tests and homework assignments on any one day (Rettig & Canady, 1997). According to The Center for Educational Reform, students concentrate on only four courses per semester. Students have extra concentrated time to study fewer subjects (Queen, 2000). Students can take on more projects and papers to grasp a more in-depth learning. The projects and papers are replacing the traditional multiple-choice quizzes and similar assignments. Classes are longer and they are more highly-concentrated to get a deeper understanding. Various teaching methods and innovations in the new, longer classes are replacing the old lecture style. The flexibility in longer classes creates innovations such as field work, labs, team teaching and multidisciplinary classes that are conducive in this type of scheduling.

In a study at the Watauga High School in Boone, North Carolina on mixing block and traditional scheduling, Childers and Ireland (2005) found that most students have less homework each night because of a lighter course load. They also found that it helped at-risk students because it allowed them to focus more on academics because they had fewer courses.

Block scheduling positively changed students attitudes for school. Zepeda and Mayers (2006) found a decrease in student anxiety because students had fewer subjects to study for. Decreases in discipline referrals and dropout rates with an increase in attendance and grade-point averages have also been found to result from block scheduling (Gruber & Onwuegbuzie, 2001). According to Queen (2000), students

received more individual attention from teachers in the block schedule. Zepeda and Mayers reported that student misconduct was reduced following the implementation of block scheduling. The combination of children excited to learn and teachers inspired to teach leads to better attendance, higher grades, and lower failure and dropout rates for students in the block scheduling program (The Center for Educational Reform, 1996).

According to Rettig and Canady (1997), some students can graduate in three years or earn college credits while in high school because eight credits can be earned each school year. The student does not have the stress of taking eight courses at the same time. Students have the opportunity to take four or more additional courses in high school while on the block schedule compared to the six-period daily schedule. This enhances academic environment by increasing the number of courses a student can take in a four-year period (Queen, 2000). This also increases the number of students completing Advanced Placement courses.

Teachers also benefit from increased instructional time due to the extended periods of time (Rettig & Canady, 1997). Teachers have more time to plan lessons that use a variety of teaching strategies other than lecture. They have fewer courses and work with fewer students during any one semester. A less stressful, cleaner school environment tends to accompany the 90 minute block scheduling plans. An improved climate results in a more relaxed atmosphere, with greater student/teacher rapport (Queen, 2000). According to Rettig and Canady, the improved school climate and quality of the school day from block scheduling is positive for both students and teachers. Gruber and Onwuegbuzie (2001) also noted that the greatest advantage found in block scheduling is an improvement in the school climate. Teachers only had to keep grades

and records for half the number of students (Queen). The reduced time on paperwork gave teachers more time on lesson planning. Queen states that a tool for curriculum improvement has been the schedule change. Fewer textbooks are required because the classes can be split between the fall and spring semester and use the same textbooks (Rettig & Canady).

Students can devote more concentration and time to each subject when they have only four classes at a time to deal with (The Center for Educational Reform, 1996). Students have more time to learn and they spend less time changing classes. Teachers also spend less time with getting the students ready for class and the administrative tasks. There is a decrease in required work load for the student and teacher, allowing the student more time to learn and the teacher more prep time, grading time, and more one-on-one interaction per student.

In a study done by Rettig and Canady (2003), results showed that schools operating under block scheduling for five or more years had a number of positive outcomes:

- There is a reduction in management problems, because students spend less time in highly congested areas.
- There is a reduction in class tardiness.
- Teachers use technology more often and students are engaged in more active learning strategies.
- There is a reduction of stress in teachers and students due to the fewer classes that meet.
- There is a reduction in time lost to administrative duties in the classroom.

- There is more time available for student support and extended learning.
- There is additional learning time for students if they are at-risk of failing key courses.

### *Disadvantages of block scheduling*

While there have been many successful stories for those who have implemented block schedules, there have also been problems along the way (Queen, 2000). In a block schedule, students may have a hard time retaining what was taught. Block scheduling is often a challenge for students who are transferring from another school on a traditional schedule in the middle of the school year. Other encountered problems include limited number of new electives offered and lectures being overused by instructors. According to Gruber and Onwuegbuzie (2001), a commonly-cited disadvantage of the block scheduling is that missing a 90-minute class is equal to missing two class periods on the traditional schedule. Block scheduling poses problems with repetitions and drills needed daily for formulas, concepts, and language skills (The Center for Educational Reform, 1996). Students study subjects on alternating days and lose the benefit of daily repetition.

According to Queen (2000), some teachers stress the importance of providing course sequencing in block schedules because of possible retention loss when there is too much of a time gap between classes. Teachers worried that this could affect student achievement. Careful planning of two sequenced courses in one subject area during a single school year is important in a block format. This is especially important for classes that are considered sequential, such as foreign languages and math (Rettig & Canady, 1997). Block scheduling will not be effective if students are not provided with a balanced schedule.

The Center for Educational Reform (1996) indicates there is little evidence that schools in the US have seen significant gains on achievement test scores as a result of block scheduling. The testing data for block scheduling is slim. Standardized tests do not indicate increased student achievement under block scheduling. However, Trenta and Newman (2002) report that a number of studies and evaluations have been done on block scheduling over the last decade. These studies show that some have found evidence of improved student achievement. Other studies done by Trenta and Newman show that there have been no significant improvements or there has been a significant decline in student achievement.

It is often difficult to match schedules and courses when students transfer from a traditional schedule to a block schedule (Queen, 2000). Even though challenges develop with students transferring from a traditional to a block format, challenges in matching classes can develop with any transfer student regardless of the schedule.

One of the most frequent attacks on block scheduling is the reduction in instructional time per class (Queen, 2000). Time in the classroom is wasted when there is limited use of instructional strategies. Teachers often find themselves using lecture as their main teaching strategies because they find that there is too much content to cover in preparation for state-mandated tests. The overuse of lectures causes students to complain about classes being boring. The attention span of students is greater if teachers use a variety of active learning strategies (Rettig & Canady, 1997). Adams and Salvaterra (1998) examined the changes in teacher's pedagogical techniques and activities when classes changed from the traditional year-long 42 or 50 minute class to the semester-long

90 minute class. They found problems in instruction and student learning when there has been no change in their teaching habits.

*Summary*

Block scheduling is a restructuring of the school day into classes much longer than the traditional 50-minute period. School districts on a traditional schedule striving to find the most effective use of school time may examine the types of block scheduling. Studies have shown both advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling. School districts have to weigh the pros and cons of block scheduling to determine if the change would be effective for teachers and students.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes toward block scheduling. Knowing how the faculty feels about teaching in block scheduling will benefit other school administrators and faculty. Teachers' attitudes and concerns about block scheduling could further the success of block scheduling.

#### *Participants*

The research instrument was developed and administered during the 2008-2009 school year to 60 middle and high school teachers who were employed at four neighboring public schools in Wisconsin. The Alma School District, Pepin School District, Independence School District and Gilmanton School District, all have similar populations and use a block scheduling model. The Independence, Gilmanton, and Pepin School Districts all use the A-B block scheduling model. The Alma School District uses the 4X4 block scheduling model. The questionnaire was sent via school mailbox to the teachers.

#### *Design*

A survey was designed for this study. Each teacher was asked to participate in the survey and to return the questionnaire in a sealed envelope to the researcher within ten days. A locked and secured drop box in the high school office or the teacher's workroom was available for teachers as a means to collect their survey.

To increase participation levels in the survey, after ten days, a reminder letter was sent via school mailbox to the teachers as a follow up procedure. To insure that enough responses were turned in, they also placed a form with their name on it in a separate box.

The detached form with the subjects name on it was kept separate from the surveys. A reminder letter was sent to the teachers that did not turn in the separate identification page.

### *Instrument*

The development of this research project was based on literature review regarding attitudes toward block scheduling. Teacher's perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling were recorded by the questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire included items about the gender of the teacher, years of teaching experience, and years of teaching in a block schedule format. Teachers were asked to evaluate a series of questions based on the effectiveness of teacher instruction and student learning. Open-ended questions were included for teachers to describe the advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling within their department. Another item asked teachers about any modifications they made to courses or services since adopting block scheduling. A final item on the questionnaire asked teachers to describe why or why not they thought block scheduling is more effective than the traditional scheduling.

Data was gathered around five subcategories: teacher instruction, student learning, benefits of block scheduling, problems with block scheduling, and teachers overall opinion of the effectiveness of block scheduling.

### *Procedure*

A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire that explained the purpose of this study along with an anonymous consent statement. Participants were asked to return the questionnaire by a given date. As noted above, follow up reminder notes were sent to teachers who did not complete the survey during the first attempt at data collection.

The results of the study will be made available to administrators and educators to aid in determining whether block scheduling is beneficial at surrounding schools. The results from this study will hopefully aid other school districts in determining whether or not they should adopt block scheduling.

## Chapter Four

### Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes toward block scheduling. The study focused on teacher's perceptions of block scheduling regarding the effectiveness of teacher instruction and student learning, advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling, modifications teachers have made, and the overall effectiveness of block scheduling compared to traditional scheduling. The data was gathered during the 2008-2009 school year from the Alma, Gilmanton, Independence, and Pepin School Districts.

#### *Gender of Respondents*

There were 60 surveys delivered to the Alma, Gilmanton, Independence, and Pepin school districts: 45 surveys were returned. The surveys were separated by male (n=14; 31%) and female (n=25; 56%) respondents. Six participants (13%) did not report their gender. There was a 75% return rate on all questionnaires distributed.

#### *Attitude Statements Regarding Block Scheduling*

Instructors responded to three main areas on the survey which examined the effectiveness of block scheduling: a) their experience using block scheduling, b) how they compared the block scheduling experience to traditional scheduling, and c) the effects on the school environment in block scheduling.

Results of instructors experience using block scheduling are presented in Table 1. They were asked to use the following sentence stem in responding to items: "As an instructor using block scheduling.....".

The results from the chart show that, overall, more than half of all teachers responded positively to using block scheduling in their classrooms. Most of the instructors employ project based learning in their classrooms. One teacher stated, “Block scheduling gives the student time to hear directions, work on his/her project for over an hour and clean-up. They have more in-depth exploration time on projects.” Teachers agreed that it is easier to set-up and go on field trips. Another teacher commented, “There are more opportunities to do 90 minute mini field trips to locations in the district.” Teachers felt that they have more time to introduce and thoroughly develop a concept, and more time to provide individual help in block scheduling. More than half of all teachers said that they use a variety of teaching methods, do more hands-on, group-based activities, and felt it is easier to prepare for three blocks rather than five classes. They responded positively by having less stress throughout the day, and fewer student classroom disruptions. More than half of all teachers felt that block scheduling was more effective than the traditional schedule.

Teacher’s opinions in comparing traditional scheduling to block scheduling are presented in Table 2. Again, they were asked to use a sentence stem in responding to several items: “Compared to students in traditional scheduling, students in block scheduling.....”.

Table 1

*“As an instructor using block scheduling.....”*

Question 1-15	No answer		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. I employ project based learning.	5	11%	3	7%	5	11%	11	24%	21	47%
2. It is easier to set up and go on field trips.	6	13%	6	13%	7	16%	15	33%	11	24%
3. I have time to introduce and thoroughly develop a concept.	4	9%	3	7%	2	4%	13	29%	23	51%
4. I can provide more individual help.	3	7%	2	4%	3	7%	18	40%	19	42%
5. There is more time to answer individual questions.	4	9%	3	7%	1	2%	16	36%	21	47%
6. I use a variety of classroom teaching methods.	3	7%	1	2%	1	2%	17	38%	23	51%
7. There is more integration of subject matter.	4	9%	3	7%	7	16%	14	31%	17	38%
8. I do more hands-on, group based activities.	3	7%	3	7%	4	9%	16	36%	19	42%
9. I believe block scheduling is more effective than the traditional schedule.	2	4%	5	11%	10	22%	14	31%	14	31%
10. I believe it is easier to prepare for three blocks rather than five classes.	6	13%	5	11%	6	13%	13	29%	15	33%
11. I am able to increase student comprehension by using a variety of teaching methods.	4	9%	3	7%	4	9%	17	38%	17	38%
12. I am less inclined to send a student out of class for disruption because of the amount of work he/she would miss.	3	7%	6	13%	23	51%	9	2%	4	9%
13. My failure rate has decreased.	6	13%	4	9%	13	29%	17	38%	5	11%
14. I have less stress throughout the day.	3	7%	3	7%	16	36%	13	29%	10	22%
15. I have fewer student classroom disruptions.	4	9%	6	13%	15	33%	12	27%	8	18%

Table 2

*“Compared to students in traditional scheduling, students in block scheduling.....”*

Question 16-22	No answer		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
16. Better understand the importance of being here on a daily basis.			4	9%	13	29%	20	44%	8	18%
17. Have more time for hands-on activities, allowing for completion and follow through.			2	4%	1	2%	21	47%	21	47%
18. Are able to complete missed assignments upon returning from an absence.			5	11%	11	24%	24	53%	5	11%
19. Are exposed to more school-to-work activities.	4	9%	4	9%	13	29%	15	33%	9	20%
20. Have improved student achievement.	2	4%	4	9%	12	27%	20	44%	7	16%
21. Understand the material better because of the increased time.	1	2%	6	13%	10	22%	18	40%	10	22%
22. Turn in homework more often.	2	4%	6	13%	11	24%	23	51%	3	6%

The results from Table 2 showed that most teachers responded positively to student success in block scheduling when compared to traditional scheduling. More than half of all teachers believed that students had a good understanding of the importance of being in school on a daily basis, turning in homework on time, and completing missed assignments upon returning from an absence. In addition, more than half of all teachers believed that students understood the material better because of the increased time, and had more exposure to school-to-work activities. They saw an improvement in student achievement. Ninety-four percent of teachers agreed that they had more time for hands-

on activities. One teacher stated, “Shifting to a variety of educational methods and activities keeps the brain active and engaged. Students and teachers, from my experience, feel less rushed and more engaged in the activities.” Another commented, “It allows time to thoroughly cover a lesson; to not feel rushed or stressed when presenting a concept or topic. You feel more comfortable allowing students to interact and discuss. You also have time to review and monitor students work at the end of the class period, instead of seeing them rush out the door. This gives you a chance to clarify assignment directions.”

Teacher’s opinions about the classroom environment and school climate are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Teacher’s opinions about the classroom environment and school climate*

Question 23-27	No answer		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
23. Reduced passing times has contributed to a more positive school climate.	1	2%	5	11%	12	27%	19	42%	8	18%
24. Fewer bells have improved the class environment.	1	2%	3	6%	9	20%	24	53%	8	18%
25. Fewer students create a less stressful day.			3	6%	8	18%	20	45%	14	31%
26. Block schedule is the best model to improve school climate.	1	2%	10	22%	11	24%	15	33%	8	18%
27. Block scheduling encourages an increased positive student-teacher relationship.			5	11%	7	16%	24	53%	9	20%

The results from the chart show that most of the teachers responded positively to the overall school climate. More than half all the teachers felt that: a) reduced passing times contributed to a more positive school climate; b) fewer bells have improved the class environment; and c) fewer students created a less stressful day. Fifty-one percent of teachers felt block scheduling is the best model to improve school climate. More than half of all the teachers also believed that block scheduling encourages more positive student-teacher relationships. One teacher stated, “It definitely has an impact on school climate and positive relationships.”

The last part on the questionnaire asked teachers a series of questions relating to advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling. The questions posed asked teachers about the following areas: a) what they thought the biggest advantage was to using block scheduling in their school; b) what they thought the biggest disadvantage was to using block scheduling in their school; c) modifications that were made to a course or service in their department; and d) overall, if they thought block scheduling is more effective than the traditional scheduling. The questions were open-ended and allowed teachers to comment on how they felt about block scheduling.

### *Perceived Advantages of Block Scheduling*

*The advantages that were indicated include:*

1. More quality learning time and guided study time, therefore, more homework turned in on time; less interruptions.
2. More one-on-one time with students and more time to help students during class.
3. Students are less confused about their schedules and it is easier for them to keep track of assignments for classes.
4. Calmer classroom environment and school climate.
5. Builds teacher-student relationships.
6. More time for hands-on learning activities and more thorough classes; time to complete labs and projects.
7. Additional time available to complete a whole activity/project without stopping; time to complete large-scale projects.
8. Less classes to prepare for, therefore, less stress.
9. Less homework for students.
10. Flexibility in the classroom – time for more varied activities.

### *Perceived Disadvantages of Block Scheduling*

*The disadvantages that were indicated include:*

1. Gaps between classes each year.
2. Limited course selection.
3. Some students in block scheduling having attention difficulties; students with disabilities find the block scheduling too long.
4. Students wasting time – not using work-time effectively; difficult to keep students engaged.
5. Some classes and/or teachers are unable to fill a large time period with meaningful learning, resulting in wasted time and less positive teachable moments.

6. Too much content and assignments are missed in one block rather than one traditional period if a student is absent; students have a hard time making up missed time; students that are frequently absent miss much more.
7. Schedule conflicts.
8. Teachers not using the time correctly.
9. Student procrastination on homework.
10. Too much information to digest in one period; retention difficulties.

#### *Modifications Made for Block Scheduling*

Teachers responded to types of modifications that were made to a course or service in their department in response to block scheduling. Some of the modifications made were: having a range of activities on hand; including more items in one class period; including more active learning, such as learning activities and games; integrating other areas of education and the community, such as, journaling and field trips; including more in-depth exploration time on projects; shortening assignments and lecture time substantially to ensure that students do not get too frustrated; giving students work-time with assistance from the teacher; incorporating more than one skill; incorporating more small group time; attending an in-service on how to effectively teach in block scheduling; increasing technology availability to allow for a more investigative approach; and giving more individual instruction.

#### *Perceived Effectiveness of Block Scheduling*

The last item on the survey asked teachers why or why not they think block scheduling is more effective than the traditional scheduling. Overall, 24 participants (53%) felt that block scheduling was more effective. One teacher who saw block scheduling as more effective than traditional scheduling stated, "Due to the less rapid

pace in block scheduling, teachers are more rested. In addition, teachers have longer preparation time. Students have less stress due to less homework taken home. Block scheduling allows more time for closure.” Another teacher commented, “I think block scheduling is more effective because there is time to teach more ways, thus reaching more learners.”

Eleven participants (24%) thought that block scheduling was less effective. Teachers who thought block scheduling was less effective than traditional scheduling made the following comment, “I think it allows the students to be lazy! They have class time to work and don’t use it or they have a block long study hall and don’t ever have work! I think students miss out on class possibilities”; “in my subject area, I feel that a smaller daily lesson is better for comprehension. Having more class periods a day also allows more choices”; “I think it is less effective because you cannot reinforce new concepts without constant review and re-teaching”; and “for my teaching area, I feel traditional scheduling is more effective. Students see the material daily and classes are reinforced daily. This progresses learning more in my eyes compared to block scheduling where it is every other day with material, and more re-teaching because it has been two or three days.”

Eight participants (18%) remained neutral on the effectiveness of block scheduling, mainly due to the courses taught in this format. These teachers felt that for some classes, block scheduling was more effective, but for other classes, block scheduling was not more effective. Teachers who remained neutral on the effectiveness of block scheduling commented, “It depends on the class. Lecture classes I think are better on a daily schedule to allow students time and continue conversations from day to

day with little memory loss. Block scheduling for PE or lab related classes work well to complete experiments and to complete games that may take time to set-up”; “it depends on the course”; “block scheduling is only effective when proper training is given to teachers on how to conduct lessons in this format. Training is most essential”; and “block scheduling is most effective for classes where students can benefit from more work time (science, writing classes), but it is not effective for all classes. Teachers can adjust their classes but there are subjects where meeting daily would be more beneficial for some students.”

### *Conclusions*

It is incumbent on teachers to provide a variety of learning activities and the length of these activities. According to the research from Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Lab (1998), in block-scheduled classrooms, the timing of activities and varied instructional strategies are crucial elements of careful instruction by teachers. Careful instruction by teachers leads to increased learning by the students.

## Chapter Five

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study has reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling as well as the value of block scheduling to a variety of teachers. Points were addressed throughout the literature concerning the pros and cons of block scheduling. The main points of this review will be addressed.

#### *Conclusions*

First, the biggest advantage teachers identified with block scheduling was having more time available to set-up, have a thorough lesson, and clean-up. Students had time to do the hands-on portion of the lab while being able to process the activity with a follow up discussion. Teachers commented that they liked the time to do more hands-on, exploratory-type learning, with one-on-one time for each student. They could get through a complete project without interruptions. In addition, they were spending less time on administrative duties, such as taking attendance, which leads to more time teaching.

With more quality learning time and guided study time, teachers have more access to students when they are working on their homework. They can answer students' questions before the class period ends. Since study hall teachers may not be skilled in the areas where the student needs help, teachers find the guided study time to be beneficial. Teachers and students have more one-on-one time together. While spending more time with students, teachers can build relationships and give individual help when needed, which leads to an increase in student success. Teachers felt that there was a greater

opportunity to do more advanced study and to cover more material on various subject matters. This is a direct benefit for teachers and students.

Teaching in block scheduling creates a more positive school climate. With more flexibility in the classroom, fewer classes to prepare for, and less homework for students, teachers found a calmer classroom environment. A benefit for the student is that they only have three or four classes per day in the block scheduling system. They can spend more time to a small number of classes. Students are less confused about their schedules, and with fewer classes each day, they can give more attention to each one. In addition, teachers felt less stress under block scheduling. This lowered stress was attributed to the fact that they had fewer daily preparations. With fewer daily preparations, teachers have an increased amount of preparation time.

Secondly, this review addressed the biggest disadvantage teachers identified with block scheduling. The most common problem that teachers identified with was using class time efficiently. The need for variety in lesson planning was a concern. Teachers stated that discussion and lecture type classes did not work in block scheduling. In addition, teachers did not feel that students value the time given to them in block scheduling. They felt that students did not use class time efficiently. The idea of the block scheduling is made to give students sufficient time to work and ask questions to the teacher. Teachers felt that many students wasted time during this guided study time and procrastinated on their homework because they had another day to do it.

With the longer class periods in block scheduling, teachers found it difficult to keep students engaged. Keeping students attentive the entire block period raised a concern. It is difficult to keep the students attention for this length of time and to ensure

that the lesson was comprehended. This was even more challenging for those who already had attention difficulties in the classroom. This longer class period required too much content and too many assignments. In addition, if students miss one block period, it was equal to missing two class periods in the traditional schedule. Teachers felt that students had a hard time making up missed time and assignments. This becomes even a bigger problem when students are frequently absent, as they miss much more.

Another concern raised with block scheduling is the gap between courses. A student could take a course in the fall and not take the next sequential course until the following fall. It is a concern whether or not the student will retain the information needed for the following course. Research shows that those who oppose block scheduling identify retaining information in the sequential classes, such as math and a foreign language, as a concern. "Many foreign language teachers who are currently teaching in the block system state that first and second year language courses need to be back-to-back for students to be successful" (Wisconsin Association of Foreign Language Teachers, Whitewater, 1995, p. 15).

Another point of this review was perceptions of the overall effectiveness of block scheduling within the teachers district. The research findings showed a connection to teachers overall attitude of block scheduling and the subject matter they taught. There was a significant relationship between the subject matter taught and the attitudes toward block scheduling. If the subject matter was an exploratory class or a type of hands-on learning, teachers had more favorable attitudes toward block scheduling.

In addition, the research findings also indicated a significant relationship between the ability to prepare a variety of learning methods and the attitudes toward block

scheduling. If a teacher could provide a variety of learning methods in one block period, they had more favorable attitudes toward block scheduling.

Finally, throughout the research completed on this project, it appeared evident that the balance between advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling was equal. Even though the identified advantages balanced the disadvantages of block scheduling, more teachers favored the block scheduling system. Much research has been completed on block scheduling, but each proponent and each opponent of block scheduling would find support for their cause. One issue remains clear throughout the literature. Even though the research shows that block scheduling has merits, in the end, it has its' own problems too. Block scheduling can be very useful in the proper setting with the right students and a well-prepared teacher. It is important that schools look at the reasons for implementation. Test scores and discipline problems should carefully be examined to see if the schedule has any noticeable effect. Extra planning time/in-service time must be granted to teachers and administrators alike to learn about implementing a new educational reform.

#### *Recommendations for Further Study*

It is important for school districts to offer training on teaching in block scheduling. There are numerous studies on advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling, but more information needs to be gathered on the teachers' confidence and skill with block scheduling. Studies done on the impact of schools whose teachers have had sufficient training on block scheduling, would give us information on the success or failure rate of block scheduling being used in the correct way. Teachers would be better able to teach, and administrators would be better able to supply the materials or courses

needed for a teacher to successfully teach in block scheduling. Other studies might examine the transition process in order to determine the impact of block scheduling in a school, as well as teacher satisfaction and student grades.

This study was designed to provide insight into teachers' attitudes about block scheduling. A similar study of looking at each curriculum department of teachers' attitudes about block scheduling would provide useful comparisons. Studies situated in other content areas could provide useful information. How many family and consumer education teachers indicated that advantages of block scheduling outweigh the disadvantages? How many math teachers indicated that advantages of block scheduling outweigh the disadvantages?

An additional recommendation would be to study individual planning time provided for the teacher. It would be useful to examine ways that teachers utilize their planning time throughout the year in order to understand the connection between block scheduling, student success, and overall school climate.

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