

NPSD Middle School Schedule



Introductions

- Dr. Todd Bauer, Assistant Superintendent
- Dr. Tomorrow Jenkins, Principal, Pennbrook
- Mrs. Jamie Rivera, Special Education Supervisor (Middle School)
- Mr. Kyle Hassler, Principal, Penndale
- Dr. Sean O'Sullivan, Principal, Pennfield



Agenda

- Communication Plan
 - Feedback Opportunities: Cabinet, Administrative Team, Teacher Leaders, Building Level, Parents/Students
 - Work Session
- A brief history
- Hanover Research Study/Findings
- Feedback Sessions
- Proposal
- Question/Answer
- Approximately 1 Hour



Some Key Terms

- Traditional
 - 8 periods (1-8) and 6-day cycle (a-f)
 - 45 minute periods with 7 transitions (plus lunch)
 - Courses last all year long (180 days)
- 4 x 4 Block
 - Typically the same schedule each day or marking period
 - 92-minute periods “blocks” for 90 days
 - Switch classes at the semester break
 - Courses are half a year

A Brief History...

- In 2019-2020 we ran a 6-Day Cycle (A-F) 8 period traditional schedule
 - After the shutdown, challenges with online learning with 8 periods, anticipated disruptions throughout the 20-21 year
 - Contact tracing, hybrid teaching, online learning, material distribution, etc.
- Pedro Rivera, PDE Secretary of Education at the time, encouraged block scheduling for reasons above
 - Middle School Scheduling Subcommittee recommended Block for 20-21, prior to Dr. Rivera's recommendation
- For the 21-22 school year, feedback from teachers and building leadership teams (via principals and curriculum supervisors) was to stick with it for another year.
 - Continued uncertainty, many of the reasons above still apply

Hanover Research

- Professional research firm, Arlington, VA
- One of the largest research firms in the country
- Has partnership with NPSD, trusted fidelity in their projects
- Administered “District Operations Survey” Instrument in April of 20-21
- Focus Group Discussions in Fall of 2021



Hanover Research

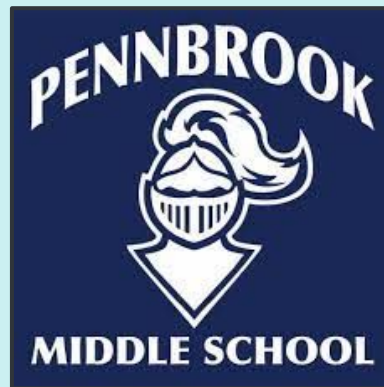
“District Operations Survey” 5,440 Respondents

Take a closer look at block scheduling to identify specific opportunities for improvement. Most middle school respondents are not satisfied with block scheduling as experienced this past school year and this is their most-selected focus area for improvement. However, a majority of them indicate block scheduling had a positive impact in many areas surveyed, so the district should start by looking for ways to improve in areas that are rated relatively lower such as student attention span and information retention or teacher planning time. Looking for key words related to block scheduling in the open-ended responses could reveal additional information about what went well or not so well.



Focus Group Conversations Led by Hanover

- Parents
- Students
- Teachers
- Administrators



Premise of the Project

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

North Penn School District (NPSD) would like to better understand the elements of successful implementation of block scheduling in district middle schools.



- ✓ Understand how parents, students, staff, and administrators **perceive the benefits and challenges** of block scheduling.



- ✓ Identify the impact of NPSD's **implementation** of block scheduling among parents, students, staff, including student learning and staff satisfaction.



- ✓ Explore **priorities and unmet needs** that exist and should be addressed in year three of implementation.



It allows **every single teacher to have a relationship with those kids**. It's much more condensed. It's exhausting. It's draining, but I can also share that I've gotten a lot more kids that have been identified, that have specific needs, that have come down [to my office] because **teachers are reaching out much more now because they're developing those relationships with the kids sooner, they're asking for help, and we're getting those resources out, and it's exponential**. Block scheduling is a huge benefit on my end because I think we're working better collaboratively as a building and as a team with the kids' benefit in mind, and that's more the **mental health component in the SEL learning** piece, not the academic piece.

-Staff

POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF BLOCK SCHEDULING

DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT



Parents, staff, and administrators recognize that block scheduling **allows for teachers and students to develop deeper relationships.*** With this relationship, teachers can focus on student development and identify needs of students that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Participants find that **the additional time supports students' social-emotional health.** Administrators report students remarking on the **decreased number of classes students need to focus on, which decreases stress.** Teachers' mental health may also benefit, as fewer classes means they have less work to grade.

"I was always hesitant to get him involved in something where he leaves school early, but I have an athlete now. I like that he went to English for some of it and then had to leave early. So even if he's missing content, he at least had a touchpoint with the teacher. That's a positive."

-Parent

"In most classes, our class numbers ratios are lower. I like that with Special Ed students with co-taught classes, they're able to do more small-group learning and still stay in the traditional classroom. There is that inclusion piece that's being tied in. That seems to be a plus."

-Staff

* Research demonstrates that block scheduling promotes "cooperative learning, quality time with students, less daily homework and provides individualized teaching."
-see secondary research, What is Block Scheduling and is it Effective? Pros and Cons



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POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF BLOCK SCHEDULING

INCREASE IN CONTENT AND CRITICAL THINKING

- ✓ Parents believe that **block schedules** provide opportunities for critical thinking and **skill development**, especially in courses like English or History.
- ✓ Staff feel there is **more time** for activities that support a deeper understanding of **course content**.
- ✓ **Students report** that they are **learning more** than they would in traditional period scheduling.
- ✓ **Administrators agree** that **block scheduling** supports **differentiation in the classroom**, giving teachers the ability to facilitate student understanding of content to their own abilities.

"We have enough time in a day to do an intro activity, do an explanation, and then they can practice and then we can do something else rather than speed through."

-Staff

"In history-type classes, it's a lot more discussion-based. [My kids] have said how they enjoy being able to explore and get into some of the anecdotal stuff or creative time to get juices flowing when they have to write essays under different points of view. They enjoy block scheduling because they felt like they had enough time to do it instead of just pushing forward to the next topic, the next period."

-Parent



PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

TEACHERS HAD LITTLE TIME TO PREPARE



Teachers report that the transition block scheduling came as a **surprise**, during a time when teachers were already struggling to teach virtually, understand Canvas, and manage stress from COVID concerns. Teachers feel they were not well prepared to teach in a block scheduling format and had very little instruction on how to do so effectively.

*"I don't think the district did enough to help us prepare for block scheduling. **There was no training at all** last year. It's like, 'Here it is.' Our training was like reading an article, and in the article, I believe it said something like, 'You really should take two years to implement this program,' which we didn't. Over the summer, **we should have been given Flex opportunities or opportunities for pay to come together to share resources** to make this easier, and that didn't happen."*

-Staff

*"They put the block scheduling in place, and then they basically said, from the admin point over in the development, 'By the way, **we're going to help you with the pacing guides. We're going to help you with redoing the curriculum.**' They gave links to resources. But what we really needed and missed, and this is a huge contention of mine with North Penn in general, is that **we're great to pick up ideas, but we're not really so great at putting the resources in place behind it, that commitment.** It's usually financial, because of staffing or something."*

-Staff





[It's about] keeping students engaged. I mean, you put yourself in [the students'] position-- **it could be torture sitting there that long. An hour and a half of anything is a really long time, and then they go from one to the next makes it a challenge.** When you're learning an instrument or something, you can't just sit down and practice for eight hours straight and become great at it. It's 20 minutes here, the next day, 20 minutes. **Your brain needs time to absorb it through sleep, through practice, just downtime.** Going through a chapter every five to six days isn't any process time. We're trying to teach the kids how to think, not be monotonous, memorizing robots.

-Teacher



CHALLENGES OF BLOCK SCHEDULING

TIME BETWEEN MATH, LANGUAGE, OR SCIENCE

Parents, students, and teachers express concern over year-long gaps between math courses in block scheduling. Concerns address learning loss from lack of frequency in access to course material or limitations on the amount of new content that can be taught when students need to review or catch up on lost content.* **Some teachers report they have not been able to get through their entire curriculum**, forcing the subsequent teacher to have to review and help students catch up to where they need to be, taking time away from new content.

Concerns with gaps between language courses are similar, and **parents feel that some courses should be continuous in order to promote mastery and reduce learning loss.**

"My concern is that those who are taking the Keystones in January, they won't see a math class until next September. And my eighth-graders might not see that math class again until January of the following year. That's a lot of time to go between classes. We need to figure out a way to prevent that learning loss or just the forgetfulness that occurs. And I have to say, I see a lot of anxiety in my students, and I know that that anxiety has always existed in Algebra 1 class where they have to take the Keystone and they know they have to pass it, but I feel that it's even more intense right now because it's just moving so quickly." -Teacher

* Some of the challenges of block scheduling including "a loss of continuity in the students' schedule, greater learning loss if a student is absent, and the curriculum may be taught at a faster pace." –see secondary research, What is Block Scheduling and is it Effective? Pros and Cons



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PARTICIPANT NEEDS

CONTINUITY OF MATH AND LANGUAGE COURSES

Parents, students, and staff agree that students need to be enrolled in a math course every semester. Administrators understand this concern and **suggest implementing intervention periods for students who are not otherwise assigned a math course.** While teachers believe that intervention periods would be helpful, they indicate that it would not be enough to reduce learning loss. Some parents suggest the integration of subjects into other courses to support the continuation of essential content.

"I would hope that perhaps they would consider a hybrid block schedule where maybe we do math all year as a half period and do language all year as a half period so that you can have the continuity and things that need to continue building."

-Parent

"With the intervention, again, I don't know if it's realistic for a student to be doing extra math work if they're not scheduled for math class. They're not going to want to do that. Some might. Others won't."

-Teacher

"I'm wondering [about] the idea of integrating math and science, so that there's math and science every block. Integrating social studies maybe with English. Have the benefit of block, but not so much retention loss."

-Parent

- "The types of flexible scheduling include block scheduling, alternate day classes, rotating schedules and dropped schedules. In more creative arrangements of block scheduling, the length of time devoted to each block may vary based on the instructional needs of the teachers and students (e.g., core academic subjects may be assigned to longer blocks while electives are assigned to shorter blocks). The length of the block could vary from day to day."

-see secondary research Flexible Scheduling



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PARTICIPANT NEEDS

BETTER MIX OF MAJOR/MINOR COURSES



Parents, students, and staff recommend a mixture of two “major” and two “minor” courses for every student unless requested. Students with more than two major courses struggle to keep up with the mental requirements and homework that come with more complicated courses such as math and science.

Parents would like scheduling limitations in be put in place, preventing students from having too many or too few major courses in a semester.

“Why is there a computer picking their classes? Someone should be looking out that the rotation of whether it’s math or English or science or social studies or whatever it is. Why isn’t someone checking? I was told the computer picks based on seats available in a classroom and that all of the classes were full. If I really wanted to change him, that was fine, but I’d have to talk to the counselor. At that point, it was too late.”

-Parent

* “Districts should modify students’ requirements to reflect new schedule and a pure 4x4 schedule is rarely appropriate and adaptations will be needed.” -see secondary research Best Practices for Middle School Scheduling and Team Teaching



KEY FINDINGS: FUTURE NEEDS



Students need:

- **Continuity of math and foreign language courses for the entire academic year** in order to prevent learning loss and prepare for standardized exams.
- **A better mix of math/science and English/humanities courses** instead of course loads that focus primarily in one area.
- **A common PennTime** across grades.

Teachers request:

- **Time for planning and meeting with other teachers.**
- **More staff to support various duties and alleviate the strain of managing block schedules.**
- **Support in teaching block courses through additional training, learning from other district teachers that use block scheduling, and through encouraging the use of instructional coaches.**

Parents need communication on the purpose and plan for block scheduling at NPSD, as many feel uneducated and uninvolved.

Participants would like the district to commit to a plan, communicate this plan, and provide resources and support.

Continued:

KEY FINDINGS: FEEDBACK AND PERCEPTIONS



Positive Feedback:

- Block scheduling provides **more time** for teachers to understand **their students' needs** and support student development.
- Block scheduling allows for an **increase in the amount of content delivered** and provides time for critical thinking.
- Parents feel that block scheduling helps limit contact between students in the hallways during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perceptions of Implementation:

- Parents indicate that they were **unaware** that block scheduling would **continue** in a second year of implementation and are frustrated that they **do not know the true purpose** of block scheduling for NPSD schools.
- Staff feel there was **not enough time and training** to prepare properly for block scheduling, and hope that the district will express long-term commitment to the model and provide resources and support accordingly.



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Continued:



KEY FINDINGS: CHALLENGES



Challenges with Block Scheduling:

- Stakeholders express concern over the potential gaps of time **between math or foreign language courses**, fearing learning loss when students do not utilize content for a full semester.
- Students have **difficulty focusing during block courses** and are **overwhelmed with the amount of content** they must consume in each class period.
- Some students have **more than two difficult courses in a semester**, and **some have no PennTime** to support this challenge.
- Teachers feel they are **rushing through content** and **do not have enough time to plan and adapt their curriculum** for the instructional needs of block scheduling.

Priorities/Goals:

1. Student success/achievement
2. More common planning time for teachers
3. Cumulative courses all year
4. Maximizing instructional time
5. Common PennTime
6. Intervention time
7. Relationship building with students
8. Professional development for teaching in the block
9. Clear communication of “the plan” moving forward



Some North Penn Specific Challenges:

1. 9th graders going to NPHS
2. NMTCC
3. 6th graders coming up to the middle schools
4. Reading intervention scheduling
5. Balancing the courses (the need for an additional special)
6. Shared staff



Current Middle School Schedule

	Semester 1						Semester 2					
Block	A	B	C	D	E	F	A	B	C	D	E	F
1A	Quarterly Minors						Math					
1B												
2A	Music	PE	Exp Lang	Music	PE	Exp Lang	Music	PE	Exp Lang	Music	PE	Exp Lang
2B	Penntime						Penntime					
3	English						Science					
Lunch												
4	Social Studies						Reading					

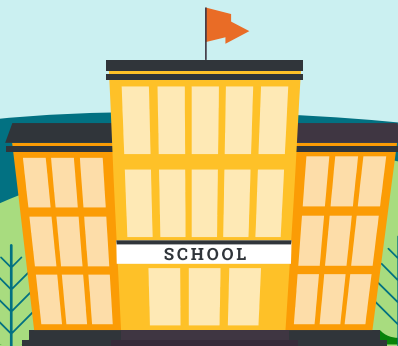
AB Schedule Proposal

	Day 1	Day 2
Block	Blue A	White B
1A	Quarterly Minors	Math
1B		
PT	PennTime	
2A	Music	PE
2B	EOT - Educational Opportunity Time	
3A	ELA	Science
3B		
Lunch		
4A	SS	Reading
4B		

Proposal -7th

		7th Grade				
Block	Blue A	White B	Blue C	White D	Blue E	White F
1A	Quarterly Minors	Math	Quarterly Minors	Math	Quarterly Minors	Math
1B						
PT	PennTime					
2A	Music	PE	Exp Lang	Music	PE	Exp Lang
2B	Math - EOT	ELA - EOT	Science - EOT	SS - EOT	Reading - EOT	Tech 7
3A	ELA	Science	ELA	Science	ELA	Science
3B						
Lunch						
4A	SS	Reading	SS	Reading	SS	Reading
4B						

Np



8th

	8th Grade					
Block	Blue A	White B	Blue C	White D	Blue E	White F
1A	Music	PE	Tech 8	Music	PE	Tech 8
1B	Math - EOT	ELA - EOT	Science - EOT	SS - EOT	5th Major - EOT	Study
PT	PennTime					
2A	Quarterly Minors	Math	Quarterly Minors	Math	Quarterly Minors	Math
2B						
3A	ELA	Science	ELA	Science	ELA	Science
3B						
Lunch						
4A	SS	5th Major	SS	5th major	SS	5th Major
4B						

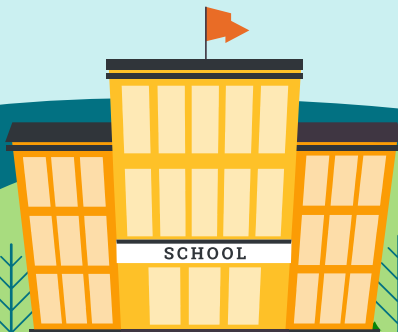
SCHOOL

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9th

Block	Blue A	White B	Blue C	White D	Blue E	White F
1A	Science	SS	Science	SS	Science	SS
1B						
PT	PennTime					
2A	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
2B						
3A	Educational Opportunity Time					
3B	6th Major/Minors					
Lunch						
4A	WL	Cycle Minors	WL	Cycle Minors	WL	Cycle Minors
4B						

Np



Strengths:

1. Core content courses all year
2. Common PennTime
3. PLC and Department time
4. Opportunity for additional support/period
 - a. This time gives students the chance for extra support from their teachers
5. Extended class periods for differentiation/project-based learning
 - a. Will also help support student Social-Emotional Learning through time to create deeper relationships
6. Better for PSSA/Keystone testing timelines
7. Easier transition to NPHS
8. Better aligns with NPHS schedule for 9th graders
9. Better mix of major & minor classes

Special Education

1. Delivery of instruction in core academic subjects throughout the school year.
2. Reading intervention scheduling also more consistent
3. Student support and case management during Penn Time.
4. Educational Opportunity Time
 - a. This Educational Opportunity Time provides an opportunity for re-teaching, support, and provide student with individualized accommodations and modifications to access the curriculum in the general education and/or special education setting.



Considerations:

1. Teachers need more professional development to maximize instruction in a block format
2. Students will need support in navigating a schedule that is a bit more nuanced
3. Can we provide new and exciting opportunities for students during the additional period? If so, what could that look like?
4. Continue to evaluate student success and make adjustments where necessary



Questions in the chat!

Np

Thank you for joining us!

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