

FAQ's from Parent Presentation on High School Schedule

1. How is this information being communicated to students?

Each school will hold information meetings with students and will address the new schedule during the 2015-16 course selection process.

2. Access to Electives

How does the schedule improve access to electives?

Currently students have to give up a lunch period to in order to take an 8th class. This schedule allows them to take the 8th class and also have lunch.

Are electives still 85 minutes?

Yes, in fact the structure of most electives such as art, business, tech ed., family/consumer science, music, etc. is well designed for longer periods.

Will there still be 'free periods'?

We expect that students will have unassigned periods (aka 'free') during the time when they are not in Health, PE, or science 'half blocks.' See #3.

3. How do science labs work?

Additional half-blocks will be allocated to science classes: two half blocks per week for AP courses and one half block per week for non-AP courses. Lab assignments may be completed in the 85 minute block or in these half-blocks, at the teacher's discretion.

4. Structure of the 85 minute block

Will students be given a break during class, as these are much longer?

Teachers will manage the 85 minute period in a variety of ways appropriate for the content. In some courses, there will be several distinct activities with transitions in between, while in other courses (think art, tech ed, science labs) the 85 minutes will allow students and teachers the opportunity to truly focus on one learning activity.

If there is a test will it encompass half the period?

The 85 minute period will also allow for a variety of assessment practices. In some instances the class can be broken up into a testing period and an instructional period, while at other times a full period assessment might be more appropriate. This flexibility factor will allow teachers to make appropriate decisions about assessing students' learning.

If there will be less homework since some of this is done during class, doesn't this negate the additional instructional hours we will have?

All work done in class should contribute to the student attainment of the objectives of the lesson. Having the students complete some of what was previously assigned for homework during the class period with the teacher available to guide and assist should produce better overall results.

Will teachers increase the homework load?

Time is being structured differently but this does not necessarily equate to more homework. Students will have more time to complete homework since class meets every other day; this will also provide them the opportunity to improve their time management skills.

What if the student has attention issues?

Students who have difficulty with focus and attention in our current schedule may also be challenged in this new schedule design. It is possible however, that having to focus on fewer classes during the day, and the variety of learning activities now possible in an 85 minute class period, will contribute to improved attention and focus. Students will need to adapt to this new structure and, if the students at the high schools we have visited are any indication, our students will adapt quickly and will enjoy the improved pace of the day.

As a parent, I would like to know how to help my child adjust to this. He is worried that he won't be able to sit still and concentrate for that long.

Parents can reassure their students that the teachers will have training in the best way to use the longer class periods and that students in other schools that use this similar schedule have enjoyed the improved pace of the day and have adapted well. It might also help the students to know that this schedule has similar characteristics to a college schedule so there may be a benefit in helping them get ready for the college experience.

Which classes will be 'half blocks?'

The current plan is to have Physical Education, Health, additional Science instruction, and some learning centers and study hall taught in the "half block" (41 minute) periods. This aspect of the schedule is still being reviewed to determine the best model.

What if a teacher is absent for the entire week?

Essentially, this would have the same impact in our current schedule. The key to maintaining a strong instructional program is to have solid lesson plans and effective substitute coverage.

How will semester/exams work?

The details of an exam schedule have not yet been finalized. This schedule provides a few options that our current schedule does not, such as giving an exam in the regular 85 minute class period, but nothing has been decided yet.

Will students have an 85 minute study hall?

This is possible but we anticipate that most students will choose to take a course during available time in their schedule. Students may use this study hall period to complete assignments, meet with available teachers, use the resources in the Library Media Center and access support services.

Will the curriculum need to be adjusted? How will this impact the curriculum pacing?

We do not expect the curriculum to require adjustment but the pacing of the material to be covered will definitely need attention. This project will be part of the work of all departments during the spring and summer of 2015.

5. How will extra help work? Will teachers have office hours on off days?

This schedule should allow more opportunities for teachers to provide extra help but those details have yet to be addressed. The expectation that teachers will provide extra help for students in need will not change.

6. Activity, Advisory and Homeroom

When will activity and advisory periods be?

We will develop an adjusted schedule—similar to our current Tuesday schedule—and accommodate Activity/Advisory. Probably once per week as it is now.

What will students do in homeroom for 37 minutes?

Homeroom is only 7 minutes

What happened to the Tuesday clubs?

See above answer regarding Activities (clubs)/Advisory

Why can't homeroom be first thing in the morning?

When Homeroom is the first thing, many students do not take it seriously and come late to school. Having a class or two first ensures that all students are here for Homeroom. This time of 10:30 also, for the first time, allows Aquaculture students to attend Homeroom, hear announcements and be included in more events.

7. The school year schedule with Day 1/Day 2

How will you balance the weeks to ensure that there is equal time for "1" days and "2" days?

The Day 1 Day 2 schedule will be set for the year to ensure an equal number of Day 1 and Day two.

What about snow days?

The set Day 1 Day 2 schedule will not change for snow days or other cancellations. Each marking period will have two days at the end that we can "flex" as a Day 1 or Day 2 to equalize any cancelled days.

Won't it be confusing to call any given day a Day 1 or Day 2?

We believe, as in a number of other schools, the students will adjust to this very readily and easily. We are considering announcing that it is Day 1 or Day 2 for the first few weeks.

What happens on Day 5, Friday?

It is a Day 1 in a week that starts with Monday being a day 1. The two day rotation of D 1 D 2 simply continues all year: D 1 D2 D1 D2 D1 D2 etc.

What about Open House, if there are only 4 classes that day?

As we do currently, we will develop a set of shortened periods so that parents will see all 8 period teachers in the one night.

How do intermittent holidays (Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, etc.) impact the schedule?

They really do not impact at all: D 1, D 2, Veteran's Day, D 1, D 2 etc

8. Special Ed. Services

It is our expectation that our identified students will benefit greatly from the flexibility gained from a longer instructional period and slower daily pace. The delivery of academic special education instruction will continue to be provided through collaborative teaching and learning center instruction. As in the previous schedule, counseling and related services will be implemented through group, individual or push-in models. Decisions regarding individual student needs and services will be take place at each student's annual PPT. Should a question arise earlier regarding your child's program, a case manager will be in contact with you.

9. Did you consider a later start time for school?

This committee was not asked to look at changes to the start/stop time of the school day.

10. Course load for students

Can students take seven classes?

Student course load is determined by student interest as well as staying on track to meet graduation requirements and meeting minimum credit requirements for promotion to the next grade level. Taking seven classes is possible as long as these guidelines are met.

Will the schedule be balanced so students don't have AP classes on same day?

The placement of courses in certain periods in the schedule is driven by student course requests, and more specifically, courses are placed in the period where the most students are available without conflicts. There is no way for us to guarantee an individual student's AP courses will be spread evenly across the two days.

What if my child wants to double up on math?

The new schedule will not limit a student's ability to take two math courses simultaneously. However, there are other important factors to consider when choosing to do this, so make sure to consult your child's math teacher and counselor.

11. How will you integrate study hall with PE/Health?

PE and Health will be offered opposite the half-block created by the additional science time (see FAQ#3). There may be days when students are not assigned to either science, PE, or Health during a half block. Under this scenario, freshmen and sophomores will be assigned a study hall while juniors and seniors would have a free period. This process is consistent with our current practice during the "lab" period for students.

12. Lunch

How will you accommodate 500 students eating lunch at one time?

FWHS will be able to accommodate the lunch waves as designed in this new schedule. The portion of the FLHS construction project due to be completed in August of 2015 will expand the cafeteria to accommodate the student load.

Lunch is shorter than it currently is. Don't the kids need to wind down a bit longer?

We believe thirty minutes is ample time for students to eat and have a break in their day. We have looked at other districts and many have lunch waves that are at 30 minutes or even shorter. The longer lunch period we have currently is one of the reasons why our instructional hours per year are so far below the state average. The new schedule provides more instructional hours to correct this situation.

Can students opt out of lunch and take a study hall instead?

All students will have a 30 minute break in their schedule where they will be assigned to attend a lunch wave. There will be no study hall option offered opposite lunch.

Will students be able to get through the lunch line in the time allotted for lunch?

Yes. The serving lines at both high schools have the capacity to add students.

What classes will have the middle lunch?

This cannot be determined until the master schedule is complete. Some classes may not be able to take a break in the middle (such as science classes that may be conducting labs). In order to balance student load in each lunch wave, about one-third of all classes will be assigned to each wave.

13. Aquaculture and RCA

How will this schedule impact a student attending Aquaculture or RCA?

Attendance to the Aquaculture and RCA programs is still possible in the new schedule. All Aquaculture students will now be able to attend homeroom, activity period, and advisory, which is not possible in the current schedule. Students who are in the BACA program of Aquaculture will gain an additional period at the high school to take a course. Students who are in the regular Aquaculture program and currently have a lunch or free period (this is the majority of current students) will not be impacted in terms of academic period access. Students who are in the regular Aquaculture program and currently opt out of lunch will gain access to lunch but will have to take one less course than they currently take.

What percentage of our students participates in regional programs?

Eighty-seven students out of 3026 (3%) attend the Aquaculture School. Twenty-three out of 3026 (0.7%) attend RCA.

14. Does this impact class size?

The new schedule should not impact class size in any way.

15. Other School Systems

What are the average instructional hours in CT public high schools?

1009 hours

What are the highest in the US?

This is determined by each state and varies. Most require between 175 and 180 days of school and/or between 900 and 1,000 hours of instructional time per year, depending on the grade level

Is 1019 sufficient time to meet increased graduation requirements?

Yes.

What other high schools in Fairfield County use this schedule?

Brookfield and New Fairfield.

16. Committee membership

Were there parents on the committee?

Parents were not on the committee but the high school PTA presidents were kept informed of the progress.

Which teachers were included who are not curriculum leaders or department heads?

There were 18 teachers on the committee. Ten of these teachers serve as curriculum coordinators or liaisons concurrent to their classroom teaching responsibilities. School counselors from each high school also served on the committee.

17. What are the possible increased graduation requirements?

As of right now, there is no plan to increase graduation requirements; however, if that were to happen, this schedule would allow us the flexibility of adding additional courses during the school day.

18. How will this impact school space? We will need to hire more teachers? Offer more classes?

The 2015-16 budget includes a staffing increase due to increased high school student enrollment, not due to the schedule. As we do every year, once students select courses, we adjust staffing needs to align to students' course selections.

19. How does this work with the music program?

We do not anticipate significant changes in the music program due to the new schedule.

20. SAT or ACT

Are there any studies about this schedule that negatively impacts SAT or ACT scores, or college placement?

A few studies have compared results between blocked and non-blocked schools on college admissions or AP scores. There are several types of block schedules, and the studies below reference the 4x4 block as the least effective. We did not consider that option.

Harmston, Pilska, Ziomek, and Hackman (2003) analyzed longitudinal differences in ACT scores for Illinois and Indiana high schools on traditional and block schedules. Over a period of seven years, the study found that:

- The mean ACT score in all subjects increased for those on a traditional eight-period schedule.
- The mean ACT scores for students in eight-block (or A/B block schedule) schools varied from year to year, with a slight increase after implementation.
- The mean ACT scores for students in 4X4 block schools declined in the years immediately following implementation, but scores bounced back somewhat in the fourth year after implementation, except in reading.

The authors end with this conclusion:

“In the end, the transition from a traditional to block schedule necessitates answering the question, “Does this schedule change meet our needs, given the unique characteristics of our local school? Will our school better meet its goals and objectives as a result of the change?”

Similarly, The College Board (1998), examined AP scores for calculus, biology, U.S. history, and English literature comparing students on an extended plan (60-minutes plus), traditional period, and 4X4 schedule. The analysis found that those on the 4X4 schedule scored the lowest, while those in extended classes scored the highest.

Proponents of block schedules point to the following benefits:

- **More time on task:** With longer class periods, classroom learning is less rushed; less time is spent on transitions between classes and classroom management activities, such as calling attendance and organizing and focusing the class. Teachers have the flexibility that enables them to allow students to spend more “time on task,” practicing and working with particular information and ideas (Northeast, 1998).
- **Depth and breadth:** With more time, teachers can delve more deeply into subject matter, because they are no longer pressed by the clock to squeeze as much content as possible into a single lesson. The longer periods allow students the opportunity to experience subject material through a mixture of learning contexts and media. Math and science teachers especially appreciate the added time to conduct more in-depth exercises and lab experiments (Northeast, 1998).
- **More opportunities for planning and professional development:** The longer blocks of time enable schools to build in reserve time for teachers to engage in common planning and on-site professional development.
- **Stronger adult-child relationships:** More time allows for greater interaction between teacher and student; when teachers have fewer students in class and students have fewer teachers, more in-depth relationships can be forged. Farbman and Kaplan (2005) found that teachers report satisfaction with the teaching load from this arrangement (typically three–four classes and a total of approximately 70–80 students compared with five–six classes and about 100 students in a traditional schedule), saying it allowed teachers to track their students’ progress, and made the job much less overwhelming.

- Studies indicate that discipline problems decrease (O'Neil, 1995; Freeman, 2001).

References

Harmston, M. T., Pliska, A. M., Ziomek, R. L. & Hackmann, D. G. (2003). The relationship between schedule type and ACT assessment scores: A longitudinal study. Retrieved on June 1, 2006, from ACT: http://www.act.org/research/reports/pdf/ACT_RR2003-3.pdf

Farbman, D. & Kaplan, C. (2005). Time for a change: The promise of extended-time schools for promoting student achievement. Boston, MA: Massachusetts 2020.

Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory. (1998). Block Scheduling: Innovations with Time. Providence, RI: Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory

The College Board. (1998, May). Block schedules and student performance on AP examinations. Research Notes, RN-03. New York: Office of Research and Development, The College Board.

21. Professional Development for teachers

Will the contractual PD time be enough for the teachers? What kind of professional development will be provided for teachers?

We plan to use the full day of PD in February as well as Tuesday afternoon meeting time to support teachers as they learn to plan in this longer block. We will include formal presentations, meetings with teachers from other high schools who have been using this schedule successfully, and visits to other schools to see this in action. We are adding to the professional library in each high school by adding resource books that address planning in the longer block. Tentatively, we may try a 'dry run' of the schedule in the spring to allow teachers and students to experience the Day 1/Day 2 schedule.

The PD will not end this year. We will continue to revisit our progress, ask teachers to provide input on their needs and work with newly hired teachers who have not taught in this schedule before.

22. Can you briefly explain the other options that were rejected?

Trimester: typical annual schedule is divided into three parts with 5 or 6 periods in each of the trimesters; periods are 60 minutes.

8 Drop 2: an 8-period schedule is constructed; each day one period is dropped from the morning and one period is dropped from the afternoon. Classes are 54 minutes.

8 Drop 2 Hybrid: Follows the 8 Drop 2 for four days and the Day 1/Day 2 for two days in a 6 days cycle. Classes are either 54 minutes or 85 minutes.

23. Comments from Parents

I think it will help students be prepared for a 'college like' day.

An experienced, New Fairfield HS alum, now college student, says she is more prepared than her peers for longer, college classes.

Great job for allowing lunch hours!

