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Perspectives...

"All the glory of greatness has no lustre for people who are in search of understanding."—Pascal

Block Scheduling Promotes Positive Classroom Atmosphere

By Scott Taylor

Block scheduling, as it is sometimes called, is being implemented in schools around the country to affect the classroom atmosphere. In many schools, the concept is proving to be very effective in improving the quality of learning and creating a more positive classroom environment.

For the teacher, the climate of a classroom is often structured by the time constraints imposed on him or her to get things done during a class. When the structure is altered, the classroom environment can change and more positive activities can be implemented.

"Learning and teaching can be at the total control of the teacher without worrying about the bell ringing and everyone running to their next class when block scheduling is in effect," stressed William Pollock, the principal of High Technology High School (HTHS). This, in turn, provides a focused atmosphere for students as they follow the instructor's plans without unnecessary interruption.

At HTHS a student's day is divided into five periods and the typical class lasts for 70 minutes. Almost twice the length of a typical New Jersey high school class period, the "blocked" 70-minute period is providing a healthy atmosphere for teachers and has been a major element in promoting a positive environment for the classroom and the school at large. The nature of the schedule brings about a dynamic and flexible force that drives teachers and students forward.

The positive atmosphere in each classroom at the high school has fostered innovative lesson ideas and varied learning strategies. A teacher from every subject department in the school has provided lessons using the Internet and other computer on-line services. These exercises have been innovative and exciting elements of lessons that would normally

require a good deal of time to implement.

Thanks to the 70-minute schedule, instructors have had the time to allow students to explore the World Wide Web as they download images for research reports, contact important experts in the necessary fields, or compile information from databases around the world. Such work could not be done within a 40-minute period. After all, computer "startup" and "shutdown" procedures alone require 10 minutes to complete.

In addition, new courses have been developed, thanks in large part to the nature of

Another student indicated that the lengthier classes, which only meet three days of the week, allow for a less mundane classroom environment. Finally, at least one pupil mentioned that the longer periods allow for greater interest in the subject since the teacher is given the opportunity to involve the students to a greater extent and at a greater level.

HTHS's distinctive "brand" of block scheduling has been put into place, and the monotonous, oftentimes routine structured day has been reconfigured to provide a less repetitive and mundane way

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the schedule. For three days of the week, freshman and sophomore students participate in discipline-integrated 145-minute classes. Biology, technology, and computer applications teachers work together to present students with a general education course, and English, Latin, and world cultures teachers combine to facilitate 145 minutes of cross-curricular learning, as well. All state-mandated criteria for teacher-student contact time are met in an innovative and dynamic learning environment.

Students also see these exciting activities and the outgrowth of block scheduling in a positive light. Based on a poll, 87 percent of the students feel that longer periods allow for a better classroom atmosphere. One student mentioned that the longer period provided for a more "relaxed atmosphere," while another stated that the blocked time gave an "adult feeling" to the classroom—the students felt a sense of maturity.

of life for the teacher and the student. No day of the week is similar to the next or the previous, as each one provides the teacher and student with a different schedule.

Block scheduling is not easy to adjust to. Students and teachers at High Tech expressed the difficulty in gearing up for an extra-long activity or discussion.

This difficult transition is discouraging some educators from implementing the idea of block scheduling. Traditional ideas concerning scheduling remain fixed and static. Block scheduling is not necessarily a new idea; however, it's an idea that is improving the atmosphere of the classroom and the school.

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Opinions expressed in Perspectives are solely those of the author and are printed in the hopes of receiving comments and differing viewpoints. ■