

Title: Teaming in middle schools

Date: December 2016

Question: Could you provide information on teaming in middle schools?
What does the research say about the 7-period day schedule?

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with references on academic teaming and school day structure, with an emphasis on the 7-period day schedule, in middle schools. Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Caplinger, R. T. (2013). The impact of flexible interdisciplinary block scheduling on reading achievement. *ProQuest LLC*. [Dissertation]

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine whether the use of a middle school flexible interdisciplinary block schedule would increase eighth-grade students' reading scores, as measured by the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS). A 90-minute middle school flexible interdisciplinary block schedule served as the independent variable and was evaluated to determine its impact on student reading achievement. Extant data from the OAKS was used to assess student learning. Extant data from two groups of students were examined. The treatment group had their eighth-grade language arts and social studies classes scheduled into 90-minute flexible interdisciplinary block periods, taught by the same teacher. The comparison group had their eighth-grade language arts and social studies classes scheduled into traditional 45-minute departmentalized periods, taught by two separate teachers. The overall amount of time allocated to language arts and social studies instruction within the academic year was the same for both groups. However, the way the time was flexed and utilized within the class periods differed between the two groups. Research Question 1 addressed the possible increase in mean OAKS reading scores over time. Research Question 2 addressed the possible differences in the mean OAKS Reading Achievement Standards cut scores over time. The results of the two-year treatment condition of a FIBS for language arts instruction did not result in statistically significant results, as measured by the OAKS. The results suggest that there may not be a significant achievement difference between schools that implement an interdisciplinary scheduled compared to schools that implement a traditional, departmental approach.

REL West Note: This is not a peer-reviewed article. We include it here for your information given its relevance to the topic.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2007). A tale of two middle schools: The differences in structure and instruction. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 51(3), 204-211.

Abstract: The article discusses a study, carried out by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey of San Diego State University, that compares the implementation of literacy-based curriculum reforms in two middle schools. After shadowing two middle school students for a day the researchers conclude that the success of such reforms is tied to the consistency with which they are applied and the structure of the school day. The authors suggest that students who attend middle schools with block scheduling and who maintain the same peer group and teachers across a number of classes make smoother transitions from elementary school and achieve better overall than their cohorts at middle schools with a more traditional structure.

Friend, J. I., & Thompson, S. C. (2010). The politics and sustainability of middle grades reforms. *Middle School Journal*, 41(5), 4-11. Retrieved on December 12, 2016, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ887751.pdf>

Abstract: Jennifer's first years as a middle school principal occurred during a time of transformation initiated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act and further intensified by demographic changes within her Midwest suburban district of 25,000 students. In the context of national educational reform during this time period, Tom Erb asked, "Who will advocate for the best interests of young adolescents?". This question held particular significance in the Sunflower School District (a pseudonym), as the superintendent and board of education decided to dismantle certain middle grades structures and practices that had been sustained for 20 years. Schools returned to a departmentalized schedule with stratified academic classes and, during this same academic year, advisory programs were discontinued in favor of a study hall period. In this article, the authors describe how the Sunflower School District fell prey to the "pendulum model" of educational reform efforts, dismantling the interdisciplinary teaming structure despite findings from relevant research studies that suggest teaming is necessary to meet the needs of young adolescents and to achieve academic excellence, developmental responsiveness, and social equity.

Hanover Research (2014). *Optimal scheduling for secondary school students*. Arlington, VA: Author. Retrieved on December 13, 2016, from https://www.mansfieldisd.org/uploaded/main/departments/CIA/assets/MasterSchedules_tudy/Research-OptimalScheduling_Secondary.pdf

Abstract: In the following report, Hanover Research presents findings from available literature about the characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of various secondary school scheduling models. The report concludes with a discussion about how to implement a different scheduling model based on identified best practices and an illustrative profile of one school district's transition to a block scheduling model.

Juby, B. (2010). Engaging middle school readers: An approach and schedule that worked for me. *Ohio Reading Teacher*, 40(1), 27-34. Available through online subscription <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-2071044031/engaging-middle-school-readers-an-approach-and-schedule>

Abstract: The article discusses how a teacher developed a schedule that included a teacher-read-aloud mini lessons, group learning activities and sustained silent reading for a middle school reading class with only a 45-minute period. It describes the classroom along with the typical dialogue of students and a presentation of studies that explain the importance of each block of the schedule. It suggests that the schedule provided an environment for the middle school readers to become better readers and appreciate reading as a valuable asset.

Merenbloom, E. & Kalina, B. (2007). *Making creative schedules work in middle and high schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Book description: This practical, user-friendly resource provides a step-by-step process for restructuring blocks of learning time to improve student-teacher relationships and promote more positive learning experiences.

Olsen, E. M., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2009). A pathway forward to school change: Leading together and achieving goals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8(4), 380-410.

Abstract: This study describes and analyzes the actions taken by the principal and a middle school leadership team, which resulted in a change from a seven- to a six-period bell schedule. Change was facilitated through the interaction of three forces: (a) transformational leadership of the principal; (b) the development of a strong leadership team, and (c) training provided by a university partner. A micro-political lens revealed that the team was able to negotiate potential political landmines, while the theoretical lenses of social and intellectual capital provide additional insights in why the team was able to take productive collective action.

Williamson, R. (2010). *Scheduling: Seven period day*. Pittsburgh, PA: Education Partnerships, Inc. Retrieved on December 12, 2016, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538287.pdf>

Abstract: Current economic conditions have forced many school districts to look at the way they organize and deliver their instructional program. One consideration has been the structure of the school day. While there are many scheduling models, research has not found that any one model has a stronger relationship to improved student learning than any other. The most important factor is the presence of a skilled and highly committed teacher. The second most important factor is a principal who is a skilled instructional leader and sets improved teaching and learning as the school's highest priority. This research brief will discuss the school schedule as a tool for improving the school's instructional program, share several different schedule approaches and then discuss the seven-period day in some detail. It will provide an analysis of advantages and disadvantages of the model and share some factors that must be considered when thinking about a seven-period day.

Williamson, R. (2009). *Scheduling to improve student learning*. Westerville, OH: National Middle School Association.

Book description: In *Scheduling to Improve Student Learning*, veteran administrator Ron Williamson gives you ideas and examples to use from the moment you decide to start a conversation with the school community about changing the schedule with the goal of improved student learning. He offers sound advice on ways to build a readiness for change and affirm a common vision. In this resource you will find real-life examples of schedules that school leaders, using a collaborative process, created to advance academic achievement in their schools.

Relevant resources to consult

The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)

<https://www.amle.org/Home/tabid/401/Default.aspx>

From the website: The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) is the leading international organization advancing the education of all students ages 10 to 15, helping them succeed as learners and make positive contributions to their communities and to the world. AMLE is committed to helping middle grades educators.

- Middle school concept: <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/MiddleSchoolConcept/tabid/104/Default.aspx>
- Teaming: <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/Teaming/tabid/115/Default.aspx>

Education Resource Strategies (ERS), School Scheduling Tools

https://www.erstrategies.org/library/school_scheduling_tools?cb=b1927c

From the website: This master schedule tool allows principals to prioritize their school's resources and think about what they want students and teachers to experience. Use the Pre-Scheduling Reflection Questions to help guide your thinking on the master schedule. There are questions for the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and the main scheduling tool can be adapted for any school level. After exploring the tool and creating a new schedule, refer to the Post-Scheduling Review for further guiding questions.

These tools were created by ERS, as a result from a partnership with Mike Rettig, founder of School Scheduling Associates. Materials were further refined in partnership with Public Impact through our collaborative work with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 2014, and has been further refined for middle schools in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

National Educational Association (NEA), Research Spotlight on Block Scheduling

<http://www.nea.org/tools/16816.htm>

From the website: Schools throughout the United States are adopting block or modular scheduling in dramatically increasing numbers. In contrast with the traditional daily six-, seven-, or eight-period schedule, a block schedule consists of three or four longer periods of daily instruction.....

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

("teaming" OR "block scheduling" OR "time configuration" OR "7 period day") AND ("middle school" OR "6-8 grade")

Search of Databases

EBSCO Host, ERIC, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the West Region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.