PREPARING FOR INSTRUCTION THE MIDDLE SCHOOL BLOCK SCHEDULE
"BIG PICTURE CONSIDERATIONS"

What to bring:
State standards and other essential curriculum documents
Classroom Instruction that Works;

Libby Roberts, who taught in a block schedule setting, will lead a professional learning community discussion/work session on the topic of effective instruction in a block schedule. This session will focus on the "big picture" of block schedule instruction and will include discussion of where AVID, SIOP, and High Yield Strategies fit in block instruction. There will be time to work on a lesson in content area groups.

In addition, more in-depth questions/issues will be identified. These will be used to shape additional professional development and support for teachers during the year.

<u>Agenda</u>
September 1, 2010

Overarching Essential Question:
- How can teachers provide effective instruction in an 86-minute block schedule?

Session Learning Targets:
- I understand the benefits and challenges of teaching in a block schedule.
- I understand the components of effective instruction in a block schedule.
- I can develop an effective lesson plan for an 86-minute block.

11:00-Noon: Basic considerations for teaching in the block schedule

LUNCH

1:00-2:30: Instructional Framework

Break

2:45-3:30: Lesson Planning

Next Steps & Evaluation

It's Hard to "Wing It" for 80 Minutes!

My 7th grade team piloted a flexible block schedule this year. We see the kids 3 times/week for about 80 minutes. We went into it with some trepidation, but it's turned out to be a grand success. The teachers love it, the parent survey showed great support for the idea, and our student survey showed about 90% of the students favored the longer class periods.

We had to do careful planning (it's hard to "wing it" for 80 minutes) and build in alternative plans when whole school activities were occurring, e.g., pep rallies, assemblies, etc. I think the thing that made it most successful was that all the teachers on my team use cooperative learning, lots of hands-on projects, choices based on what we know about multiple intelligences, and have that intuition to know when to switch gears in a class.

I found I was able to "cover" more content, since much of that time spent changing classes, doing start-up procedures, reminding everyone what we were doing yesterday, etc. was now devoted to learning time.

We all are assigning just as much homework as we ever did, but the kids' perception is that there is less homework, because they don't have homework every night in every class. They also told us it's easier to concentrate if you don't have every class every day. And then there were a few who said it was nice not to have to see every teacher every day. (I'm sure they didn't mean me!)

Parents liked the idea of more time spent on learning and praised the opportunity for their kids to learn time management. Kids (well, most of them) learned quickly that if they had a "light night" they could work on something due a couple of days later and even out their work load.

Three-Phase Lesson Plan for 90-Minute Blocks

I work with a number of middle schools on utilizing the block. The most successful teachers I know like to use a three-phase lesson plan for teaching 90 minute periods. The first 25-35 minutes is used for direct instruction. This is teaching pretty much the way you would do it during part of a 45-50 minute period.

The second phase is 30-45 minutes is used for a relatively in-depth "hands-on" activity based upon the previous instruction. In science this could be a lab; in math small teams may work with sets of data or develop alternatives or a preferred approach to solving a problem; in social studies it could involve creating a map or working on a survey; in language arts it could be one of any number of steps in the writing-editing-portoflio process; etc.

The final step, 15-20 minutes, is used by the teacher to help students connect the taught part of the lesson with the application portion. The time

involves questioning, reflection, and reteaching/reconstructing content.

Of course there are other times teachers may want an entire 90 minutes period for a complete lab, a guest presentation, or a film. The good thing (and at times the bad thing) about the three step lesson is that it moves teachers away from the temptation of trying to cover twice as much material in every block period. It requires them to identify and select the critical topics meriting a full block, and secondary topics, of which several might be covered in a single block period without in-depth application.

Block Scheduling Invites Depth, Not Breadth?

I teach 8th grade math and I love the block days! It gives me time to use all the activities that bring the skills into the real world. The kids are up and out of their seats doing surveys, measuring various objects, working on projects, etc. It takes extra time and extra thought to plan things that are relevant to the current chapter we are on in the text, but it is a blast! My students have a better grasp of the skills and retain them longer because they actually used them in the block activities.

A word of caution though, we are not getting the breadth of coverage. It is the standard argument, do you want "depth" or "breadth". After the experiences I have had this year, I will go with in-depth understanding of fewer things over exposure to a lot but understanding little!

More Time, Fewer Preps

I have been using a block schedule for several years in my middle school team. English and social studies are blocked so that we have the same students back to back. We have four classes on our team. The social teacher and I really like this method. We see our kids for about 80 minutes every other day. It is good because we can use a good block of time to develop a major lesson or have several different activities during a period. We can also combine our two classes for a two-hour block, if we wanted to show a movie for example. We have a simple schedule with doubled periods Monday-Thursday and single periods on Fridays. We vary the length of the class periods if there is something special going on and if we lose a period due to an assembly, etc. we can even split up the remaining period by having a mini 19-minute class with each group.

Some advantages are fewer preps per day. You gain a lot of time which is usually taken up with the kids getting out their materials etc. The students benefit from having more time on task and seem to really like the longer periods. This year the practice was starting to be adopted by a couple of ninth grade teachers and some other teams in our building. Hope this helps.

Three – Part Lesson Framework: " I DO"   "WE DO"   "YOU DO"

Lesson Components	What teacher does - What student does	Instructional Strategies
#1: "I DO."	**Teacher** • reviews previous learning • sets lesson objective • engages learners • activates prior knowledge • builds background knowledge and vocabulary • introduces/explains new learning target • demonstrates the targeted skill • presents new knowledge • re-teaches **Student** • listens, watches, asks questions • engages/takes notes	
#2: "WE DO."	**Teacher** • guides practice of new skill • provides activities for applying new knowledge • questions & checks for understanding • gives feedback **Student** • practices, using teacher guidance and feedback • collaborates to apply new knowledge	
#3A: "YOU DO." (formative assessment)	**Teacher** • offers multiple opportunities to apply new learning *independently* • assigns appropriate homework • gives feedback • monitors progress • makes decisions about re-teaching and other *interventions* **Student** • applies new learning *independently* • uses feedback to set goals and improve performance • monitors progress on goals	
#3B: "YOU DO." (summative assessment)	**Teacher** • assesses progress summatively • Communicates informatively about students' progress **Student** • Reflects on progress • Sets achievable goals • Monitors progress	

"I Do, We Do, You Do" Six-Part Block Lesson

Lesson Component #1: "I Do"

1. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS LEARNING (5-10 min)

2. EXPLANATION & PRESENTATION OF NEW LEARNING (5-20 min)

Lesson Component #2: "We Do" (with feedback)

3. APPLICATION ACTIVITIES & GUIDED PRACTICE (30-40 min)

Lesson Component #3: "You Do" (with feedback)

4. FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT (10-15 min)

5. RE-TEACHING & GOAL SETTING (as needed)

6. SYNTHESIS & CLOSURE (10 min)

Block Schedule Planning Questions

Component #1: "I Do."

What will students learn?

1. What previous learning should I review?
2. What previous learning should I re-teach?
3. What is this lesson's learning objective/target?
4. How will I engage the learner?
5. How will I activate prior knowledge?
6. How will I build background knowledge and academic vocabulary?
7. How will I introduce the new learning?

Component #2: "We Do."

How will I help them learn it?

1. What activity/activities will I provide to guide student learning?
2. How will I check for understanding?
3. When/how will I provide feedback?

Component #3A: "You Do." (formative—"for" learning)

How will I/they know when they have learned it?

How will I respond when they either don't know it or already know it?

1. What opportunities will I provide for students to demonstrate/apply their new learning independently?
2. When/how will I provide feedback?
3. What will I re-teach?
4. What interventions will I undertake?

Component #3B: "You Do." (summative—"of" learning)

1. How will I finally assess student progress?
2. How will I communicate about student progress?

High Yield Strategies

Setting Objectives
Providing Feedback
Summarizing
Notetaking
Cues
Questions
Advance Organizers
Cooperative Learning
Nonlinguistic Representations
Reinforcing Effort
Providing Recognition
Generating and Testing Hypotheses
Identifying Similarities and Differences
Homework
Practice
Building Background
Building Vocabulary

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#3B: "YOU DO." (summative assessment)	**Teacher** • assesses progress summatively • Communicates informatively about students' progress **Student** • Reflects on progress • Sets achievable goals • Monitors progress	Reinforce effort* Provide recognition* Unit/semester/year-end pen/pencil tests Yearly state-level tests of student performance Culminating exhibitions Portfolios Conferences High-stake performances