



The Principals' Partnership

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Research Brief

Trimester Schedule

Question: Why do a trimester schedule?

Summary of Findings: With the advent of block scheduling, many high schools conducted research on utilizing that plan in a trimester format. There appeared to be three issues that most schools faced: How to provide substantive instructional time that was not fragmented?; How does the school climate contribute positively to students' learning?; and How to provide the appropriate amount of instructional time so that each student can learn in the best ways for him/her? *Breaking Ranks* suggested that: curriculum should offer essential knowledge that makes connections to real life; instructional strategies should actively engage students in their learning; the environment should be receptive to the learners and educators; time and space be reexamined and utilized to best meet the needs of the students; and all stakeholders should be accountable for assessment of the instructional program.

Major Findings and Conclusions:

General Characteristics

1. 12 week trimesters-3 per school year
2. 5 classes per day for one trimester, referred to as the 3X5 schedule
3. 2 official grading periods per trimester at the 6th and 12th weeks
4. Teachers teach 4 classes per trimester.
5. 70-72 minute periods of instructional time
6. Study halls appeared to have been eliminated

Advantages:

1. Students can take more electives
2. Students can take different types of classes than they might have ordinarily taken
3. Homework loads are lighter
4. Students have more time to devote in depth and quality time to a fewer number of subjects
5. Students are more willing to take a challenging 12 week course than they are in a semester structure
6. If a student fails a class, there are more opportunities to repeat it and still graduate on time.
7. Increased graduation requirements
8. There are fewer class changes, which makes for fewer potential disruptions and discipline problems that often arise from students moving around a facility
9. Teachers have fewer preparations each trimester
10. Teachers have fewer additional assigned duties
11. Teachers have more daily planning time of 70-72 minutes
12. Curriculum is reevaluated and realigned to what is considered important for the students to know
13. Creation of new courses
14. More time for comprehensive instruction and strategies



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Disadvantages:

1. Teaching strategies may not change from a straight lecture format
2. Flexibility needs to be built into the schedule to address course needs in areas such as music and foreign language
3. Three master schedules need to be developed each year
4. Teachers may initially have more preparations over the course of the year, especially if they are teaching newly developed curriculum

Online Resources:

- A Colorado School's Un-Rocky Road to Trimesters
An overview of the transition from a traditional calendar to that of trimesters is chronicled in this article. Its structure and benefits are also described.
http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199511/abstracts.html
- Better Flexibility, Tighter Curriculum Available in a Trimester Plan
This is a description of considerations that were taken into account when examining the trimester schedule. It cites advantages and disadvantages of this type of schedule.
http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1998_05/focMiller.htm
- *Breaking Ranks: A framework for secondary reform project*
A description of the process used in Vermont in conjunction with the Northeast and Islands Regional Education Lab and Brown University is offered.
http://www.lab.brown.edu/programs/lab2000/secondary_breaking.shtml#Data
- Brown, M. H. *Breaking Ranks: Blueprints for futures schools*
This article provides the major themes that are present in *Breaking Ranks*. There is also a description of the roles that the principals, students, and teachers should play in the 21st century.
http://alliance.ed.uiuc.edu/email/list-archive/IAES_1996-97_119.html
- Can Schools Really Change?
How meaningful is change is the theme that runs throughout this article. This could provide a strong focus for schools that want to implement deep and meaningful change.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=21smith.h20>
- Five Day Trimester
A very brief overview of a five period trimester is described here.
<http://www.wdpsd.com/HighSchool2/fiveperiodday.htm>



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- **Roseville Area Schools**
A description of the 3X5 schedule that was to be implemented at this high school along with the types of courses and credits that could be earned are previewed.
<http://www.roseville.k12.mn.us/info/scheduling.cfm>
- **School Schedules**
This lists all of the public high schools in Utah and the type of schedule each has.
http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1998_05/focMiller.htm
- **Southridge High School and the Trimester Schedule**
An in-depth description of the process used by this high school when studying a change in schedules is described here. It also lists some excellent advantages and concerns that were considered when deciding to change to a trimester system.
www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/descriptions/southridge/pdf/trimester_scheduling.pdf
- **The Power of Innovative Scheduling**
This article provides an extensive overview of different scheduling options in elementary through high school. It includes a description of the trimester system, along with a sample schedule.
http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199511/toc.html
- **Trimester Schedule at Madison High School**
An overview of a 5 period, 72 minute day is described along with benefits of a trimester system.
http://www.madison.k12.sd.us/superintendent/trimester_schedule_at_madison_hi.htm

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