
TIPTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION
MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of School Trustees

FROM: Kevin Emsweller, Superintendent

DATE: MAY 11, 2020

RE: **Block Scheduling at THS**

There has been, and continues to be numerous and passionate discussions about the use of Four-Block Scheduling at Tipton High School. This type of scheduling has been in place at THS since the 1990's. A review of research does not provide whether this is a good model or a poor one. Research does indicate that with any scheduling model, there will be pros and cons. What really matters is how instruction is imparted to students to maximize their success.

In 2018, TCSC examined whether this type of scheduling should be continued. A copy of a recommendation and the surveys that were completed are attached. The summary indicated there was support for the continuation of the Four-Block Schedule.

At this time the board wished to reconsider and move away from using this schedule. While some wanted to institute a change for the 2020-2021 school year, it would not be possible without major disruption to students' schedules.

It is recommended that the issue of using Four-Block Scheduling at Tipton High School again be studied with a recommendation for its use being made to the TCSC School Board no later than the November 10, 2020. The Superintendent, School Board President, and THS Principal should jointly name a committee to begin this study no later than August 21, 2020 to make its recommendation to the board.

TIPTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION
MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of School Trustees

FROM: Kevin Emsweller, Superintendent

DATE: 04/05/2018

RE: Block 4 Schedule

Previously, the board was provided a report on the discussion around the Block 4 schedule used at Tipton High School. Following an informational meeting held in January, surveys were conducted of students, staff, and parents as to their opinion on the use of the Block 4 schedule over other possible schedules. From those surveys, there is overwhelming support for the continued use of Block 4 schedule at Tipton High School.

In addition, results of the Senior Exit Surveys conducted by the Tipton County Foundation have been provided to the board. From the selected questions, the survey results show that the high school is effectively preparing its graduates for post-secondary opportunities.

Like any schedule, Block 4 is not without its drawbacks. Along with the recommendation to continue the use of the Block 4 schedule, is a list of recommendations for improvements. This would include ongoing professional development for teachers on how to more effectively use the Block 4 time to better enhance their instruction, as well as exploring ways to reduce the conflicts that students may have in getting the courses of their choice. The high school has further elaborated on those recommendations to outline steps they will take to make improvements within its current organization.

After this extensive review of the use of Block 4 Schedule at Tipton High School, the school will continue in its use.

Examination of Block 4 Schedule at Tipton High School

Survey Summary and Recommendations

February 7, 2018

For some time there has been some concern expressed about whether the Block 4 schedule used at the high school was the best schedule for student success while in high school and after high school. There is limited research on the subject with most of the data coming from major studies in the mid-1990s. What research is available is inconclusive. Research can be found to support its use; there is an equal amount of research that sites disadvantages to the Block 4 schedule.

As is noted in the limited findings that have been located, any schedule used at the high school level will have its pros and its cons. What one person sees as an advantage, another may see as a con. Any schedule will have its issues with any given student. It will come down to the students (and their parents) having to make choices about courses they can and cannot take. The bottom line is, regardless of what schedule is employed, it is the teaching strategies that will determine the success of a high school student through their career.

To conduct our own unscientific research, TCSC began by hosting an informational meeting for parents. Almost 50 parents attended the meeting on January 22 where information about the Block 4 was shared. Both the pros and the cons of the Block 4 were provided. Some members of the audience also added their opinions to the issue - for and against.

Following the meeting, the PowerPoint and a brief summary of the pros and cons of Block 4 was distributed to parents (with students in grade 7-12), high school students, and high school teachers. These stakeholders were asked to complete a short survey. This survey was developed by the administration with input sought from the board members.

The results of this survey show an overwhelming support for the continued use of Block 4 at Tipton High School. While there is support, there are also areas that need to be improved to enhance the opportunities and quality for the students.

In addition, the Indiana Department of Education was contacted for any information they would have regarding the different types of schedules used in high schools. After they searched their department, they did not find any department responsible for this aspect of high school structure. They were able to provide a list of high schools and what schedules they use. Fifteen middle and high schools in Indiana currently use the Block 4 model. A middle school in Michigan City is about to switch to the Block 4 schedule after they researched the issue. The list

of schools using Block 4 will be helpful in reaching out and networking with these schools on successfully implementing the Block 4.

Summary of Surveys

The teachers of THS like using the Block 4 schedule. Of the 39 teachers who responded to the survey 100% felt the Block 4 should continued. Comments provided a number of advantages in using the Block 4 compared to other schedules. The students also like the Block 4. Of the 321 respondents, 97.8% stated they liked the Block 4. They too provided a number of reasons why they felt it was better for them.

The parents responding to the survey also showed favoritism to the Block 4 schedule. Of the 136 respondents, 85.9% were in favor of continuing with the Block 4. For those not in favor of the Block 4, a couple of responses suggested having the potential gap of time that can pass when a student may have a subject is a concern.

Overall, the responses were very favorable with the Block 4 schedule. That does not mean the school should say OK and do nothing. There are some things that can be done to make the students experience in the classroom more productive. As one parent noted, "I think block scheduling really is a good thing, but I also think it only works well with certain teachers!" Ongoing professional development in the effective use of time and effective strategies in a Block 4 schedule will be needed.

Recommendations

- Continue with the Block 4 schedule in use at Tipton High School.
- Additional, ongoing professional development is needed. This may include
 - Articulation of expectation of the administration for teachers teaching in a block schedule
 - Introduction of what the block schedule is and how teaching methods should be used
 - Sharing best practices of what works, such a time management
 - Provide mandatory training for new teachers on the how of working in a Block 4 schedule (i.e introduction to teaching in the block schedule)
- Explore ways to provide more flexibility in the schedules provided to students to maximize students choice and preferences, such as flipping some limited offerings from one year to the next, independent studies, online courses, etc.
- Make the use of the block schedule advantages for:

IDOE's Pathways	Internships	John Hinds Center
IUK Courses	OJT Opportunities	
- Explore ways of to reduce the "gaps" between courses
- Continue to combine classes when and where possible (e.g. Spanish 3 & 4) to allow more offerings of electives.

Selected summary for the TCF Senior Exit Surveys

		Class of 2014	Class of 2015	Class of 2016	Class of 2017
	# of respondents	43	55	72	119
1	Did THS help you develop the skills you need to be successful in your post-high school path?	72%	60%	78%	73%
2	Was the coursework at THS challenging?	51%	53%	64%	NA
3	Did THS generally have high standards?	70%	62%	64%	69%
4	How well prepared were you for the transition to post-high school opportunities? (average & above)	86%	74%	82%	88%
5	How well prepared were you for post-high school in language arts? (average & above)	89%	75%	65%	94%
6	How well prepared were you for post-high school in math? (average and above)	86%	75%	81%	85%
7	How well prepared in the use of computers? (average and above)	88%	84%	86%	91%
8	How well did THS provide students with a broad range of electives (arts, vocational) (average and above)	84%	78%	92%	94%
9	Did THS make learning interesting by connecting lessons to real world?			47%	50%

- The first survey was actually sent to the Class of 2016 near graduation time. This is the same time the surveys were sent to the Classes of 2014 and 2015.
- Question #2 did not appear in the survey for the Class of 2017.
- Question #9 did not appear in the survey for the Class of 2014 and the Class of 2015
- Questions 1-3, 9 asked for a “yes” or “no” response.

- Questions 4-8 asked for a rating of: Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average, Needs Improvement, or No Response. For those questions, the percentage in the total of EXCELLENT, GOOD, and AVERAGE.
- Not all questions from the TCF Surveys are listed here. Only the questions that would be germane to the impact of the total instruction provided at THS and subsequently related to the Block 4 Schedule.

Observations (based on “average and above” numbers):

The number of respondents was smaller the first two years when graduating classes would range between 125-130 students. The Class of 2017 shows a better response rate with 119 respondents – well over 90% responding.

Almost 75% of students felt THS helped them develop skills needed to be successful in their post-high school path, even though slightly Over 50% felt the coursework was challenging and yet, the school had high standards (1,2,3)

Over 80% of students felt their THS experience prepared them for their opportunities after high school (4)

Over 80% of the respondents felt they were prepared for language arts and math following high school. (5,6)

Close to 90% of students felt they were provided with a broad range of electives while at THS. (8)

NOTE: While questions 7 and 9 are not directly related to their high school preparation for their future I wanted this information as I was collecting. Question 9 should be a subject for an area of improvement in the school’s SIP and/or with AdvancED.

Tipton High School

Plans for further development of Block 4 instruction.

1. Monthly Faculty Meetings

- a. Each department will be assigned a training session during that time.
- b. They will discuss best practices and share specific examples of what has worked effectively and also share things they have tried that have not gone as planned.
 - i. Aug - Administration
 - ii. Sept. - Language Arts
 - iii. Oct. - Fine Arts (Choir, Band, Art)
 - iv. Nov. - Mathematics
 - v. Dec. - Industrial Arts (Business, IT, Ag, FACS)
 - vi. Jan. - For. Lang.
 - vii. Feb. - Social Studies
 - viii. March - Special Education
 - ix. April - Misc. (Health, PE, Guidance, Media)
 - x. May – Administration

2. Department Head Mtgs.

- a. Every other month- Discussion about best practices and any new effective strategies that have been implemented effectively.

3. Department Mtg. – Block 4 will be included in each meeting.

4. Summer Academy

- a. Sessions will be offered and led by veteran staff members dealing with teaching strategies.
- b. Mandatory session – New teachers will be trained to prepare them to teach on the block

5. New Staff

- a. Will be assigned a mentor, within their department if possible, who will meet with them as follows:
 - i. Aug., Sept., Oct. – bi-weekly on the second and last Friday of the month
 - ii. Nov. – Dec. , once a month on the second Friday of the month
 - iii. Jan., Feb. – Biweekly on the second and last Friday of the month
 - iv. Mar. – May, once a month on the second Friday of the month
- b. We will assign mentors and mentees a common prep time when possible.

6. E-learning Days

- a. Block 4 will be included in 2 of the 4 planned activities.
- b. Will seek out speakers to come in from outside for these days. For example the Bureau of Education & Research has a specific topic called “Practical Teaching Strategies for Block Schedule Classes.” It is led by Dave Vawter who is considered an expert on block scheduling training techniques and practices.

7. Online Materials

- a. Teachers will be supplied with materials for online seminars and webcasts that can be viewed on their own time and during their prep periods. For example: Mr. Stillson has a Google Drive Folder with training opportunities and sites that can be accessed with teaching tips and strategies being used by other educators.

8. Research

- a. We have begun searching for other area schools of similar size and make up with which to open a professional dialogue. We will begin discussing and sharing ideas with them about what techniques and teaching strategies are working for teachers at their school. The DOE has a list of other schools using a block type schedule. We will use that list as a reference for contacting schools of similar size and student demographics.
- b. Scheduling flexibility and alternative scheduling plans will continue to be researched. Those which allow students to get as many of their subject matter choices worked into their schedules will be studied and assessed. We will look at our block scheduling and looks for ways to implement these positive practices.
- c. The recently State Board of Education mandated Graduation Pathways must be implemented moving forward. These new mandated guidelines are being discussed and developed now at THS. Taking them into consideration, block scheduling is by far the most advantageous plan on paper. Every speaker we have heard making presentations from the DOE to IASP to ISTA has stated the advantages of a block schedule in implementing the alternative pathways students may to graduate. Students who aren’t able to earn the required score on the ACT/SAT will have to use one of these alternative pathways to earn their diploma. We are currently in the process of developing various pathways and seeing how best to use Block 4 scheduling to accomplish this task. Our task is to present the most comprehensive plan of options for our students, who find themselves in this situation.

Pros and Cons of a Block 4 Schedule vs Traditional or Other Schedules

Note that with any schedule there will be pros and cons.

What is one person may see as a pro another may see as a con and vice-versa.

Pros of Block 4 Schedule

- Longer class periods for more flexible learning time, with more in-depth discussions, more hands-on, interactive learning, and more extensive use of technology usage.
- Students have fewer class each semester to focus on (4 vs 6) thus having less stress. Teachers have fewer students each day which allows them to more effectively adjust instruction based on their needs. This is especially true for students with IEPs.
- Students can take more classes in their career at THS than on a more traditional schedule.
- Students have more opportunities to choose elective classes.
- Students have class time to get a good start on their homework or even assignment completion at school with teacher help. This frees them up after school for family time, extracurricular activities and even work.
- The longer periods provides better alignment with the new graduation pathways requirements with such things as internships.

Cons of Block 4 Schedule

- The course material must be condensed.. Teachers cannot cover as much material in each subject in one semester's time. More topics could be covered in a course if the class was offered all year.
- Time management is an issue for students who finish their work early in a class. They must be given more work or find things to stay occupied.
- There is a gap between classes. For example, a student may go one, or even two semesters without taking a math class or an English class.
- It may be difficult for student to schedule classes they would like to take.
- It is difficult for students to move in or transfer in to THS in the middle of a semester.
- Not many area schools are using a Block 4 schedule.
- With having a different schedule, it is difficult to share staff between the buildings.