

A Review of the Alternative Scheduling Report
Submitted by Diane Walker to Keystone Council
10/10/96

The individuals who compiled this report are to be commended for their thorough and thoughtful analysis of alternative scheduling. This review provides reactions, questions and responses to the issues presented in the report

Response to Seven "Agreed Upon Points"

1 *We cannot continue with the schedule/process as is*

a. *Not enough FTE's*

b. *The configuration of our day limits variety in a student's schedule; college entrance requirements limit options such as fine arts (Yes, 90% of our students intend to go to college, but how many actually do?)*

The conclusion that we cannot continue with the present schedule/process has been a consensus among Keystone throughout this discussion. Earlier reports from the Action Teams as well as yearly department frustrations with scheduling and the registration process suggest that this conclusion is strongly supported among the U-High community. While no new system will meet 100% of the needs of 100% of our community, it appears that we are obligated to search out and implement a system that will improve the education of U-High students. None of the options reviewed in this report will solve all of our scheduling/curriculum problems. They may, in fact, create new ones. This should not be justification for staying where we are. We may not be able to create something perfect, but can we create something better?

The problem of FTE's must be addressed whether we change our schedule or not. Therefore the point that alternative schedules proposed in this report would require more staffing is moot. We require more staffing now. This issue will need to be addressed regardless of our schedule.

QUESTION: The report does not indicate the extent to which staffing would need to be increased. How would this increase compare to our current staffing shortages? Before adopting a new schedule, we would need assurance that necessary staffing would be provided.

Certainly, all of the options presented in this report would offer students the opportunity to take more classes. Whether any of the proposed schedules would enhance the fine arts or vocational areas would be dependent on the configuration of the actual schedule.

While 90% of our students may not actually go to college, it is true that 90% of our students intend to go to college. Most students and parents who choose University High School expect a curriculum which will prepare the student for higher education. We should recognize and respect this expectation realizing that in the "real world" there are very few options for the high school graduate outside of the four year college or the community college.

This does not rule out the need for practical and work place skills provided by vocational

education. Many graduates who initially enroll in college will not complete degrees and those who do will still need the skills noted above. An alternative schedule which would enhance our vocational ed. program is desirable.

2. *Shorter periods would be good for some disciplines, but not for others.*

This statement is also true with respect to longer periods as well as the current 55 minute period. The comments in this report identifying the need for time for " **assimilation of material**" in certain disciplines are valid. Forcing certain courses into a time frame that would be a deterrent to learning would negate our efforts. Hybrid Proposals #1 and #2 offer possible solutions to this problem. The AB or 8 block and the 4x4 do not offer flexibility with respect to period length.

3. *Teaching a greater number of shorter class periods in a day may amount to the same "minutes" in the classroom" but does not equal the same amount of work.*

The concern that scheduling changes will result in more preparation, planning, assessment and contact time is repeated throughout this report. It is an important consideration. If our goal is to offer more courses, then teachers will have more preps. If teachers interact with more students daily, then time needed for grading and record keeping will also increase. All of the proposed changes will require teachers to rethink and alter the way they currently teach.

Presently, faculty are "overburdened, underpaid and stressed." Will we or should we consider options which will add to these problems? **Concluding statement #3 ("most important is what's best for the kids, not for the teachers")** is troubling. Faculty are right to expect a work environment that respects our physical, mental, emotional and financial well being. We must look at this issue closely. Are there aspects to alternative scheduling that would alleviate current faculty burdens? (See **Reported Advantages of block scheduling B.E.F**) What supports would faculty need to make alternative scheduling a viable professional option? Are we likely to get these supports? **Conclusion #5 ("The faculty must be sold on the new schedule")** is crucial.

4. *A schedule which provides for teaming (eg. Chemistry/Trig) would need maximum flexibility, rooms for large groups, the ability to take one course without the other for some students.*

Either proposed Hybrid (especially #2) and the Additional Options within this report optimize flexibility for interdisciplinary teaching. If multiple sections of a course are offered, but only one section "teams," students not wanting to take both courses would have other options.

4 (cont)

The facility ("large rooms") concern is an important factor. We should not design and implement a schedule for the purpose of enhancing teaming when we don't have the facilities to support such endeavors.

QUESTION: Can our facility *facilitate* proposed curriculum/schedule changes?

5. *We need to remember that not all kids would be as "fired up" about the opportunity to take such courses (4 above) as we would need them to be in order to fill these "experimental" classes.*

The decision to offer "experimental" classes should not come from the fact that we have adopted a schedule making them possible. Our decision to offer such classes should come from the conviction that this is a good way to teach. (Conclusion #4 - "The curriculum must drive the schedule.") If we determine that innovative teaching strategies will enhance education, then we should endorse a schedule which will accommodate such teaching. The above statement, therefore, is more an issue of curriculum than schedule. Certainly, the two are significantly related, but curriculum needs must dictate scheduling.

This report does indicate that our current schedule does not offer the flexibility needed for the courses we are currently offering, not to mention experimental courses we may offer in the future.

6. *The latest "fads" (cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaming) are not the only way to teach and may not be best for every student or teacher.*

Although the scheduling alternatives presented in this report would accommodate such "fads," it would not be necessary for all teachers to use these strategies all of the time. The flexibility offered in the Hybrid Proposal #1 and Proposal #2 schedules could accommodate a variety of teaching and learning styles.

The Block AB or Block 8 and the 4x4 Schedules would offer more of a challenge to teachers who primarily use a teacher directed/ lecture format

Any system which deters our efforts to service the varied learning styles and needs of our students should not be considered.

7. *If we pilot some kind of project as in 4 or 6, we must be careful not to create animosity (a school within a school).*

In past discussions regarding scheduling, it has been noted that many (not all) of the problems with our current schedule ("we cannot continue with the scheduling/process as is") resulted from the unforeseen impact of FIRST. As we consider changes in our schedule, we must consider the impact on the entire U-High community. The detailed analyses and questions raised within this report indicate that we are cognizant of that need. Any move forward (or not) must be as thorough as this report.

It is clearly stated in the report that "faculty must be sold on the new schedule" Strong support from the faculty should alleviate (if not eliminate) animosity.

The reference to "piloting" a program relates to item G under **Guidelines for Implementing Scheduling Changes ("include an evaluation component")**. This is imperative. We must not try something for the sake of *trying something new*. Our decisions must be founded in sound educational theory. A very specific evaluation process must be part of any plan we adopt.

Additional Comments

The impact of scheduling alternatives on our C & I obligations are not addressed in this report.

Other issues with respect to our relationship with ISU are noted in this report. How many of our students currently take classes at ISU? Would a new schedule at U-High eliminate this option for a significant number of our students? Would the benefits of a new schedule outweigh this sacrifice?

It was unclear to the reviewer how the proposed schedules would enhance learning for higher ability students, but be a deterrent to lower ability students as indicated in the report.

It is important to note that the common reasons for adopting block scheduling in a school do not apply to U-High (V. Comments after studying block scheduling A.) Would any of the proposed changes significantly "fix" our present frustrations with our schedule?

Conclusion

It is the conclusion of the report that "**Block scheduling is not for us,**" and that the hybrids presented "**is better.**" This reviewer agrees with this conclusion. I believe the flexibility offered by the hybrids could alleviate some of our current scheduling problems, and enhance the education of our students. I also agree that we need to be sure these enhancements will "**outweigh what we do now.**"

The report indicates that it may not be prudent to completely overhaul our current system. For that reason, I suggest we give careful consideration to the **Additional Options** section. This section includes some very innovative and creative ways to better service our students. Given the opportunity, I am sure others in our community could suggest equally provocative scenarios. That these options could much more easily be designed into pilot programs with established time frames and predetermined evaluation methods is also a plus.