



High School Scheduling Workshop
Thursday, November 18, 2004 – 5:00 p.m.
School Board Meeting Room
Stuart, FL 34994

Members Present

Susan Hershey –Chairman
Lorie Shekailo-Vice-Chair
Dr. David Anderson
Laurie Gaylord
Nancy Kline
Dr. Sara A. Wilcox, Superintendent
Tom Elfers, School Board Attorney
Katie Gillen, Student Representative (MCHS)

Members Absent

None

Staff Present

Hank Salzler, Ginger Featherstone, Al Fabrizio, Al Krueger, Ray Parrish, Rodger Osborne, Dr. Frank Raffone, Marshall Skinner, David Hall, Joan Hunt, Pat Schmoyer, Delores Calloway, Rose Taylor, Ruth Pietruszewski, Tom Higgins

Public

Lisa Paul, Charlene Bachmen, Danielle Coton, Eileen Helfman, Mickey Wich

Press

PBPost – Rani Gupta

Stuart News – Kelly Tyko

MCEA – Jeanette Phillips

AFSCME – No representation

Call to Order by the Chair and Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States.

1. Presentation on High School Scheduling

Dr. Frank Raffone, Executive Director of Instructional Services, stated that scheduling usually follows the current trend, but our consideration in scheduling should be meeting the students' needs. The state in the last five years has intervened and placed requirements on all high schools on how to deliver services and instruction to students. Students must pass the FCAT to graduate. Flexible scheduling effectively delivers the best opportunity for learning and becoming a successful citizen. Middle school reform is underway, which will probably require a 90 minute reading block. Flexibility and creativity must be used in scheduling, so that time allotments can be provided for all subjects.

Joan Hunt, Principal of Martin County High School, and David Hall, Assistant Principal of Martin County High School, gave an informative PowerPoint presentation on scheduling.

Joan Hunt explained the four types of schedules, traditional, 4x4 block, A/B block, and flexible. She described our current practice at district high schools of using 4x4 block, and A/B block combined with skinnies. A portion of all the scheduling types are used for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. Intensive math and English courses usually use double blocks all year long. For thirty years, Career and Technical courses have been taught using double period blocks every day all year. Honors and College Prep courses typically use block schedules, and some combine skinnies or A/B block in the schedules. Because of recently imposed state requirements, more courses have been added as skinnies or A/B block, to allow them to meet all year long in order to get the students ready for testing. The 4x4 block has afforded the opportunity for students to achieve more credits and additional electives. We have added more students in AP and IB courses.

Ongoing teacher training is needed to learn strategies and techniques for teaching in the different scheduling patterns. Accountability of student learning, individual student needs, and student performance on standardized tests must be considered. She presented five years of data on SAT scores. Our district scores are all above the national average. Studies have shown that the chance of graduating from college in four years was doubled by taking 2 AP courses. That information was the criteria used to make the decision to open AP and IB courses to more students. FCAT scores were impressive. The district's scores and graduation rate out

1. Presentation on High School Scheduling (Con't)

performed the state. We attribute our high performance to alternatives given students for graduation options including: Adult Ed, Spectrum, Dual Enrollment, IRCC, and the fact that students can earn 32 credits within the school day.

The state requires 24 credits for graduation. The current Martin County School Board policy requires 26 credits for graduation. Presently students have the ability to earn 32 credits with our flexible scheduling. FTE funds 300 minutes of instruction per student. All freshmen and sophomores, as well as a number of juniors and seniors at all three high schools, receive 400 minutes of instruction; therefore, 100 of those minutes per student are unfunded.

The public misconception of block scheduling is that class time is not used efficiently, that students do not have homework, that students are required to do one activity for 100 minutes, that students cannot master large blocks of coursework without adequate time to process the concepts, and that FCAT accountability is limited. Dr. Sara A. Wilcox asked Joan Hunt to explain the current perception that FCAT accountability is limited. Joan Hunt replied that the worry is if students are not in the course the entire year that the FCAT is compromised. Dr. Sara A. Wilcox asked Joan Hunt to explain the current perception that students are required to do one activity for 100 minutes. Joan Hunt responded that staff has heard that students are given one activity, and they are bored.

Lorie Shekailo asked what happened in 2000/2001 school year to make those SAT scores so much higher than the other years. Joan Hunt answered that they are different students and sometimes an individual group tests higher. We have so many more students taking the SAT, and if a few students score extremely low, the entire scores are lowered skewing the results. She explained how paying attention to getting students prepared raises the scores. This year MCHS had 8 national merit scholars. Pay Schmoyer, Principal of South Fork High School, agreed with Joan Hunt. Nancy Kline asked if the only assessment we have after the FCAT in 9th and 10th grade was the SAT and ACT taken in 11th and 12th grade. Joan Hunt answered that starting this year there will be a science test in their junior year. There will be a drastic change in the March 2005 SAT. Dr. Frank Raffone reminded the board that when SAT scores are reported, it does not matter how many times a student takes the test, it is only the last score tabulated that is reported. Pat Schmoyer advised one way to monitor higher level student's progress was through AP and IB exams.

Lori Shekailo expressed the community's concerns that block scheduling could allow a student to carry math courses one semester and then have a gap, not carrying the course for a couple semesters.

Joan Hunt suggested the student should see someone to have their schedule adjusted should that happen. The schedules are designed so there is not a long gap. Ginger Featherstone, Principal of Jensen Beach High School, added that next year Jensen Beach High will pilot an AB day for on-level course work students, so that they can do an alternating days and have that course work all year. Joan Hunt added that teachers prefer alternating days to skinnies. Educators believe it is important to have a larger block of time. Laurie Gaylord felt that the block scheduling would work well for AB, IB, and honors students; however, she expressed her concern for the lower level and struggling students.

Pat Schmoyer said we capture the struggling students through the labs that we have. It is critical for the student to pass the FCAT to earn a high school diploma. Math teachers with lower level students have found that smaller units of time over a longer period of time work better for that type student. We are using flexible scheduling to meet the individualized needs of different level students. Sue Hershey wanted to know what students do with the additional time when they are enrolled in three blocks instead of four. Joan Hunt stated that they are off. Sue Hershey asked what determines if they have three classes or four. Joan Hunt replied that several criteria determine if they have three or four blocks, such as, the number of credits, their GPA, and parental input.

Sue Hershey asked each Principal to give their opinion on our current policy of requiring 26 credits for graduation. Pat Schmoyer said we do what is in the best interest of our students. Our students can get through the 24 state required credits in a 6 period day and still have an additional 50 minutes for an extra class. She said we need to be fiscally responsible, perhaps reconstructing and better utilizing what we're doing, thinking about the feasibility of offering the entire school system that extra 100 minute block, and investigating what courses students are taking in the 100 minute block. Joan Hunt said 24 credits would be sufficient for some. She was reserved about this issue because she is a comprehensive high school person. She felt we definitely did not need 32 credits and should move towards fewer credits offered. She agreed with Pat Schmoyer that a 6 period day with an optional 7th period may be a good choice. Ginger Featherstone said we need to meet the needs of the students throughout the district. We need to assure that we are sending our graduates onto an even playing field. We need to determine if those 2 extra credits lift our students to a higher academic level and give them a better opportunity for success. Our present system enables some students to enter college as sophomores and has been a cost savings for our parents. She felt 32 credits were not needed; however, it gives the lower level student that had a poor freshman or sophomore year the opportunity to go back and fix that. Dr David Anderson asked how many of the 26 units taken are required units. Ginger Featherstone told Dr David Anderson that 15 ½ were required. Dr. David Anderson stated that the importance is not how many units but what courses the student is taking.

1. Presentation on High School Scheduling (Con't)

Lorie Shekailo stated that from personal experience, after her son had earned 24 credits, she felt he was not prepared to go to college. The open period allows the student to become well-rounded. She stated that high school is a time for growing, maturity, and establishing well-roundedness. She felt that cutting our credits to 24 would take a lot of that away.

Nancy Kline questioned if the high schools or district had done a current comprehensive survey of teachers, parents, and students. Nancy wanted to know if these perceptions were current and how the community was reacting. Joan Hunt said the students like block. More teachers like the block. The parent surveys sent out had little response, so the evidence is inconclusive. She explained that we look at what is working for the students and make changes. Dr. David Anderson asked what research and what universities have said about block scheduling. Joan Hunt said nothing is definitive. It depends on qualified teachers and what is done in the classroom. Dr. David Anderson said when block scheduling was first introduced he voted against the decision. He repeated that we must make sure we do the best for the vast majority of our students.

Pat Schmoyer observed that no one schedule is good for all. We need to look at the courses being taught. Science and vocational courses are far better taught in a longer period of time because of labs and prep time. Lower level maths, before you get to Calculus, are far better taught in smaller blocks of time over a longer period to understand the concepts. In conclusion, flexible is the best schedule for all students.

Dr. Sara Wilcox said the high schools have been evaluating, monitoring, and listening to teachers and students from which the flexible schedule has evolved. We are looking at data and doing an ongoing evaluation, which has led us to move towards the flexible scheduling. Dr. David Anderson said the Board wants what is right for all students. The program needs to be evaluated from all aspects.

2. Financial Impact of the Scheduling Process

Hank Salzler, Assistant Superintendent, reported that the Martin County School District presently provides 100 minutes of instruction per day that is unfunded by the state. He presented a financial analysis offering three options, from the maximum possible savings to our current position. Currently the district offers students 8 classes per year. Lowering the number of classes offered would generate cost savings. If the district offered 7 classes per year, students would have the availability of earning 28 credits. If the district offered 6 classes per year, students would have the availability of earning 24 credits; consequently, the number of credits required for graduation would have to be reduced from 26 credits to 24. The maximum possible savings reducing classes to a 6 period day would be \$3,340,359.00. The savings would be cut in half if the district went to a 7 period day.

Dr. David Anderson said it comes down to what is the right thing to do for the students. Hank Salzler answered that the 7 period day gives students the opportunity of earning 4 more credits than the state requires, with plenty of options and electives, and we can still maintain our 26 credit requirement for graduation. There will not be as much of an opportunity to repeat classes; therefore, our summer school costs will probably go up.

Sue Hershey asked if the class size amendment would affect the projected savings. Hank Salzler stated that he had done the calculations according to what the class size amendment required. Nancy Kline asked if they were making an economic decision. Dr. Sara A. Wilcox and Hank stated they were just providing the Board with all the information.

Sue Hershey passed the gavel to Lorie Shekailo, Vice-chair, since she had to leave the meeting. She asked Tom Elfers to call the names of those who signed cards requesting to speak.

3. Open to the Public

- Lisa Paul, Charlene Bachmen, and Danielle Coton, a junior, a senior, and a sophomore from SFHS, respectfully. All three are SGA officers and all three agreed that block scheduling was the best. Their course schedules and courses are diverse, so they've experienced the different scheduling. Lisa and Charlene have taken IB courses, and Danielle has taken on-level and honors courses. They described the reasons block scheduling benefited the students.
- Thomas Higgins, SFHS board certified teacher for 21 years, distributed handouts on SFHS block scheduling. He presented a teacher's view. He reiterated that the School Board always makes decisions based on what is the best for all students. SFHS has a "Bull Dog" flexible schedule that meets the needs of all students. Each student is an individual, and SFHS adapts the schedules so that "no child is left behind." The scheduling is not perfect and new laws have presented challenges, so they are always looking for ways to improve. Extensive training is needed for teachers. Our current flexible scheduling makes the most sense for the most students.

3. Open to the Public (Con't)

- Eileen Helfman, parent of MCHS 9th & 10th grade high school students, was curious about the disciplinary problems related to block scheduling. She supported flexible scheduling, because she thought it difficult to focus in a longer time period.
- Mickey Wich, parent of 6th grader at SMS and MCHS graduate, agreed that 100 minutes was too long to focus and retain material. She agreed that math courses should be taught in a shorter period over a longer period of time, so that students would retain the knowledge in preparation of the SAT.

4. Open to the Board

Dr. David Anderson

Was pleased that we established the flexible schedule and hopes the district continues to work towards improvement

Nancy Kline

Felt it was unfortunate that we don't have more parent, teacher, and student input. She likes to make decisions that are data driven. The information given leads us to believe that flexible scheduling is the ideal. Nancy believes that Administrators and teachers are the best to decide what works at their individual schools.

Katie Gillen

Supported the block scheduling, but thinks the flexible scheduling is the best. She deems that the teacher knows what scheduling is best for their particular subject.

Laurie Gaylord

Stated that evaluation has evolved block scheduling into the flexible scheduling. The combinations make scheduling a nightmare, but it is the better choice. Our scores have improved.

Dr. Sara A. Wilcox

Commended our students for being articulate and thinking through the reasons to support their opinions on scheduling. They gave us both pros and cons. Dr. Sara A. Wilcox expressed her opinion that teacher training was a primary issue in teaching 100 minutes. The most important key is the teacher in the classroom. That is what makes a success of student achievement. She reported that major disciplinary infractions had declined with block scheduling, because usually these occur in the halls during passing times. The School Board imposed 6 periods about the time Sara became Superintendent, which caused some negativity. The schools started looking at other ways to deliver instruction. Dr. Wilcox wants to evaluate comprehensive A schools. She wants to investigate the 350 minute scheduling, like Palm Beach County schools have adopted, to see if it would benefit our students and help fund qualified teachers. She encouraged high schools to work with SAC groups to get opinions from students and teachers on which courses would be AB or skinnies. She wanted to provide parents with options, if they desired to have their students take Math all year.

Lorie Shekailo

Thanked parents and students for their participation. As a parent, she has experienced and likes the flexible scheduling. She would like input from graduates. She is concerned about reducing credits, because she feels that high school is the time for students to become well-rounded. She would like to look at the 350 minute schedule, but is opposed to the 300 minute time frame. She invited the public to the County Council of PTA meetings which would begin in twenty minutes. It will be a meet and greet for the School Board. All will be given the opportunity to view art work from elementary, middle, and high schools that participated in the reflections program.

There being no further business to bring before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

CHAIR (Sue Hershey)

SECRETARY (Sara A. Wilcox, Ph.D.)