

The average middle school adolescent is bombarded on a daily basis with numerous disjointed concepts, facts and bits of data and information. At Northport Middle School, students in grades 6-8 are expected to sit through eight 43 minute periods, including lunch, and twenty-eight minutes in passing time. This learning environment is not conducive to deep, meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the staff at Northport Middle School is looking to implement the concept of Block Scheduling.

With the guidance of building administration (principal and assistant principal), support from Central Office, and a committee comprised of staff members from several departments, we are looking to enhance student-learning opportunities. Block scheduling will provide students with interdisciplinary lessons, real-life applications, student inquiry, and time to process and understand information as well as provide opportunities for higher-level thinking. Currently teachers are forced to condense their teaching into “forty-three minute” moments daily. Some teachers refer to this as “mention-it-and-move-on” because they need to cover a certain amount of material in order for students to feel prepared for the New York State Assessments and Regents exams.

Knowing that this change will not happen overnight, its driving force and purpose is to meet the needs of the students and provide the best learning environment for all of them. Meeting bi-weekly, the committee communicates and shares research, pros and cons, and sample schedules. This dialogue is consistently focused around the shared mission: to provide a favorable learning environment for adolescents. After reading, *Sustainable Leadership (Hargreaves, 2006)*, several of the Seven Principles of Sustainability can be found woven in the task of implementing this change within the building.

Hargreaves and Fink's first three principles: Depth, Length and Breadth happen to be the pillars on which this change relies on for stability and strength to move in a forward direction. Depth requires deep and broad learning as opposed to the superficial testing and narrowly defined achievement. At the heart of this need for change is the need for students to gain a deeper understanding of the world around them and how to apply what they are learning in school outside the building in which it is learned. Stretching leadership among all of the committee members creates a sense of lasting change and lasting leadership. Committee members come to the table with varied experiences, knowledge and expertise in their curriculum. Veteran teachers as well and first-year teachers create a balance of leadership. Taking the charge from the committee and branching out to the rest of the faculty provides a sense of breadth. Leadership is shared and therefore spreads among colleagues. This notion of a shared vision creates a "buy-in" by the staff. Staff members do not feel threatened by the change or feel like it is being forced down their throats by administration. This is not a top-down change and therefore has a better chance of surviving any changes that might occur with any administrative changes in the future.

Changing to a block scheduling format will require a shared responsibility not just among the faculty, but will include the support of students, support staff, mental health staff, and parents. Leadership cannot rest on the shoulders of the principal alone. Creating learning communities as described by Hargreaves and Fink, will help enable the scheduling change. These learning communities will stimulate professional dialogue and development. Colleagues will be able to share teaching styles and techniques on how to change for a forty-three minute lesson format to a ninety-minute format. This change

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will require a combination of teacher directed instruction and student directed instruction as well as inquiry. Colleagues will turn to each other for support and assistance while administration will continue to push for professional development opportunities and instructional leadership.

In conclusion, the success of this change to block scheduling depends on the path that this journey continues on and the sustainability of its parts. I believe the success of this change could be in part to the similarities found in Collins and Porras' (2002) ideas of successful, lasting corporations: putting purpose before profit, starting slowly and advancing persistently, not depending on a single visionary leader, growing leadership from within instead of importing, and learning from diverse experimentation.

This change will not be successful with the implementation of another district's schedule, plan, or idea. Using research we have gathered and creating a sustainable plan of action, an attainable timeline of events and effective leadership, we can look to move in this new direction. We, as a learning community must look at how this change can occur within our building, with our facilitators of learning, working under the same shared vision of how we can better meet the learning needs of our students.