

Communication Points about a 4x4 Semester Schedule

Scheduling changes are one way to support increased student learning. How we structure time, change grading practices, enhance instructional classroom practices, and have high expectations for students are all ways that will result in students learning.

Scheduling:

The schedule will feature 4 class periods each day. Those class periods are approximately 80 minutes each. There is a fifth period called Intervention/Enrichment (I/E) Block which is approximately 50 minutes. One or two of the I/E blocks will be devoted to the Personalized Learning Portfolio (PLP) time, when students meet with their advisor, and another time will be used for Activity Block, which is time for clubs and meetings.

Teachers will instruct three periods a day, as well as to be available for student assistance in the I/E period. Department chairs, by contract, will instruct one less period a day and will continue to support teachers in their department, through providing needed professional learning and coaching.

The reported benefits of the semesterized block schedule are:

- Usable instruction time is increased. Students are able to spend more time on task in a concentrated fashion. An increase in the amount of time per class allows for instructional strategies that directly involve students in their own learning;
- With a longer period of time in which to teach, classes of 80 minutes make it possible for students to do significant research, engage in a seminar, view and discuss videos, complete a set of learning centers, or have a guest speaker. Teachers are motivated to employ a variety of instructional activities, other than lecture.
- In a semester schedule, by breaking the school year into two parts, students focus their time on four classes at one time, instead of seven or eight classes in one year.
- There is a reduction in the number of preparations for teachers, which makes it optimal for teachers to focus intently on the classes they teach;
- There is a reduction in the number of students for whom a teacher is responsible. This allows teachers to get to know the students better and ensure that each student receives individualized feedback and instruction;
- I/E time provides the students an opportunity several times through the week to either receive extra help from the teacher (all teachers are available at this time) or to work on projects.
- Time for I/E enables students to retake assessments, which is a part of the changed grading practices, to ensure all students demonstrate “mastery” or “proficiency” in what they are learning;
- Time for I/E also can be used for Mastery Based Learning opportunities, in which a student can take a course during this class period (similar to what previously was called “Independent Studies”)
- I/E also can be used as a time for any student who has an Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to meet with the Special Education teacher, to ensure the student receives the instructional time specified in the IEP;

- When homework or practice work is assigned, more homework gets completed, as time in class and time during I/E enable the student to have this time and students have fewer classes to balance in each semester.
- A semester schedule gives students the ability to retake a class, or the portion of the class, in which they have not achieved mastery. In other words, students do not repeat the class the following year; they complete the class in one year.
- Time can be made available within the school day for students to experience internships and work experience programs;
- Improved student behavior is expected, as a result in the reduction in the amount of passing time during the school day.
- A block schedule is a more suitable environment to proceed with a more personalized learning environment. Personalized learning is a focus area for Connecticut schools, as well as other schools nationwide.

DATA:

What data supports changes at Housatonic?

We look at trend data for several years and the number of students who have received D's and F's. A D or an F in a course indicates that the student was not able to show he or she is proficient in that subject area. We expect that all students should be able to demonstrate proficiency, with the support from teachers and administrators.

The trend data for the number of students who have not shown mastery of content (receiving a "D" or "F" in a course) have not shown marked improvement for the past several years.

2016-2017 Data for Quarter 1 & Quarter 2:

| | Quarter 1 | Quarter 2 |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Students with 1 or more D's | 118 (28.30%) | 143 (34.29%) |
| Students with 1 or more F's | 82 (19.66%) | 99 (23.74%) |

Three Year Comparison:

| | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Students with 1 or more D's | 184 (45.89%) | 167 (40.05%) | 143 (34.29%) |
| Students with 1 or more F's | 118 (29.43%) | 96 (23.19%) | 99 (23.74%) |

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THAT COMMONLY ARISE:

Does a student take only one math class a year?

Students can take math for both semesters each year, if they choose. With a number of math courses for students at the high school, for students who master Algebra I and Geometry, there will be room in the schedule for eight math courses in their high school career.

For students who elect to take one math course a year, if students have mastered major math concepts/standards, they will not forget any more in a semester than one forgets over the summer months. (Retention studies support this.)

Where do college credit courses and AP courses fit in?

While we currently offer four dual credit courses in which students receive both high school and college credit, Central Office is working with both Northwest Connecticut Community College and with Western Connecticut State University to expand our dual credit offerings. We anticipate that we will be adding dual credit course opportunities each year. This enables students to acquire a number of college credits upon high school graduation.

AP classes are planned to run all year long. Students still have the choice to take the AP exam. If they receive a high score on the AP examination, this can have weight with colleges.

What about World Languages?

In the semester schedule, students could take 4 years of two different languages, if they choose. Students can also enroll in a world language course every semester.

Will students have opportunities to take a number of courses and electives?

Some electives will be offered every other year, versus every year. For electives with high enrollments, we plan to schedule those each year. We will not "lose" any electives where student enrollment numbers have shown these to be important courses for students.

To enable students to participate in a number of electives, some electives will be offered every other day, all year long. These “every other day” electives or courses generally occur in the music/band areas, but may occur in other subject areas, as well. Whether the elective is offered every day or every other day depends upon whether these opportunities enable more students to be able to participate in course offerings.

Students will need to plan their four years of high school, based upon these offerings.