

# A BLOCK SCHEDULE THAT'S WORKING

Two Oregon music teachers reflect on their program  
after four years on the block schedule

by Rick Plants and Tom Barber

The first thing that needs to be stated is that the success of the music programs at Mountain View High School in Bend, Oregon, (a four year high school with an enrollment of 1621 students) within the block schedule is directly related to the support of the administration, the staff, the parents and the school board. As mentioned in one of the past articles in *Voice*, it is essential that all these groups support, understand and are willing to work collaboratively to make sure that no part of the curriculum suffers or in some cases is eliminated. Compromise is essential in all areas, or the block schedule will be extremely divisive.

There is no perfect block schedule that meets the needs of all areas. However, the one we have implemented at Mountain View seems to work for us as well as the other curriculum areas, including math. In the four and a half years we have been on the block schedule, Mountain View has experienced the following:

1. An increase in the SAT scores (both Math and Verbal),
2. A decrease in the dropout rate from 7.4% to 2.33% (one of the lowest in the state),
3. A 50% increase in band, choir and drama enrollment ( part of which is attributed to a 25% increase in school enrollment),
4. Implementation of a *Project Learning* program,
5. A journalism department that for two years in a row has produced a school newspaper, *Viewpoints*, that has been selected as the most outstanding school newspaper in the state,
6. An increase in enrollment in vocational courses as well as other electives,
7. Recognition as the first and only school in Oregon to receive the *Governors Oregon Quality Award*.

The important thing to understand is that all the above were accomplished under the budget restraints of Measure 5.

## How Our Block Schedule Works

Mountain View's block schedule is a combination of the standard four block schedule where students meet every day, and the four block rotator schedule where classes meet every other day. This is the equivalent of an eight period day when compared to the traditional six or seven period day. This provides more opportunity for students to take electives. Specifically for music, students can enroll in one or more music courses all four years of high school, and still take a variety of other electives and their required courses.

The schedule is divided into four blocks of 85 minutes with a 20 minute tutorial period and a 35 minute lunch between B and C blocks. During tutorial, all teachers are available for individual instruction, make up work, sectionals and other activities. Teachers teach three blocks, have a one block prep period, a 20 minute

MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH SCHOOL TIME SCHEDULE	
6:30-7:25 (45 MINUTES)	EARLY BIRD
7:30-8:55 (85 MINUTES)	A-1 A BLOCK A-2
9:10-10:35 (85 MINUTES)	B BLOCK
10:35-11:35 (60 MINUTES)	TUTORIAL TIME (20 MINUTES) LUNCH (40 MINUTES)
11:35-1:00 (85 MINUTES)	C-5 C BLOCK C-6
1:15-2:40 (85 MINUTES)	D BLOCK

tutorial period and a 30 minute duty-free lunch. Blocks B and D are non-rotator blocks that meet every day. One credit courses meet everyday for a semester, half credit courses meet everyday for 9 weeks, and two credit courses meet everyday for the entire year. Blocks A and C are a combination of both rotator classes and non-rotator classes. They are referred to as A1 / A2 and C5 / C6—A1 rotates with A2, and C5 rotates with C6. This is unique to Mountain View. Courses like band, choir, journalism, drama, and yearbook that need to meet all year are taught as rotators.

In order to meet the needs of the students taking these classes, it is important that other courses of substance be taught as rotators to take on opposite days. This is where you need the support of the other departments and the administration. Courses like basic English, PE, health, keyboarding (typing), woods, metals, automotive, leadership, etc. must be offered in order for the music program to be successful in the block schedule. There was a lot of opposition to the rotators at first, however, after four years of refining the course offerings and schedule, I have not heard any complaints or requests to change this year.

This schedule allows the offering of four rotating performance groups in both band and choir, and a possibility of other courses like music theory, voice, keyboard, music appreciation, being taught as semester courses. Currently offered are:

1. Concert Band - A 65 piece freshman band.
2. Freshman Jazz Band - A 25 piece beginning jazz band.
3. Symphonic Band - A select 95 piece sophomore through senior band.
4. Jazz Band - A select 25 piece advanced jazz band.
5. Mixed Choir - A select 85 voice freshman and sophomore choir.
6. Concert Choir - A select 110 voice sophomore through senior SATB choir.
7. Jazz Choir - A select 28 member jazz choir.
8. Music Theory - A *Project Learning* based independent study course.

All students in the advanced jazz ensembles are required to be enrolled in one of the large performing groups, either symphonic band or concert choir. (You could write another article on the benefits of this requirement.) Mixed Choir and Freshman Jazz Band are being

taught A1 and Concert Band A2. This allows freshmen to be in both Concert Band and Mixed Choir. Symphonic Band and Jazz Choir are taught during C5, while Concert Choir and Jazz Band are taught C6. Again, this allows students to rotate between band and choir as well as being in both a large performing group and an ensemble. Most AP singleton classes are scheduled in A, B or D blocks, which avoids conflicts with advanced classes. This is where you must have a curriculum administrator who supports your program.

We are both currently teaching one other course outside the music curriculum, however, this is not a result of the block schedule. Tom is teaching Global Studies, and Rick is currently the Activities Director, and teaching a leadership class. We were both in these other areas before the block schedule was implemented. With the increase in demand for music classes, we are discussing adding additional classes.

BAND TEACHER SAMPLE SCHEDULE					
Shaded classes are "rotator" classes; weeks reverse					
TIME	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
6:40-7:25	Early Bird				
7:30-8:55	A1 Fresh Jazz Band	A2 Concert Band	A3 Fresh Jazz Band	A4 Concert Band	A5 Fresh Jazz Band
9:10-10:35	B Global Studies	B Global Studies	B Global Studies	B Global Studies	B Global Studies
11:35-1:00	C5 Symphonic Band	C6 Jazz Band	C5 Symphonic Band	C6 Jazz Band	C5 Symphonic Band
1:15-2:40	D Plan	D Plan	D Plan	D Plan	D Plan
CHOIR TEACHER SAMPLE SCHEDULE					
Shaded classes are "rotator" classes; weeks reverse					
TIME	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
6:40-7:25	Early Bird				
7:30-8:55	A1 Mixed Choir	A2 Music Theory	A3 Mixed Choir	A4 Music Theory	A5 Mixed Choir
9:10-10:35	B Leadership Class	B Leadership Class	B Leadership Class	B Leadership Class	B Leadership Class
11:35-1:00	C5 Jazz Choir	C6 Concert Choir	C5 Jazz Choir	C6 Concert Choir	C5 Jazz Choir
1:15-2:40	D Plan	D Plan	D Plan	D Plan	D Plan

For both of us the block schedule has been a positive experience. The hardest thing was the challenge of changing our teaching style from a 47 minute lesson to a 85 minute lesson. Now it's hard to imagine only having 47 minutes. We both run out of time with 85 minutes!

Below is a general summary of the pro's and con's of teaching music on our block schedule.

### Pro's and Con's of Our Block Schedule

#### Pro's:

1. Longer periods equates to more in-depth study, which allows greater retention.
2. More time for warm-ups, sight reading, fundamentals, and sectionals.
3. Students stay more focused and calmer because they spend more time in one class.
4. Less administrative time for one block period than two 47 minute periods.
5. Absences from class have decreased. This is due to the fact that students realize that missing one period on the block is the same as two periods on the traditional schedule.
6. The modified schedule has allowed students to stay in music both semesters all four years.
7. Performing groups are performing at a much higher level.
8. More prep time and fewer classes to prepare for each day. Therefore, you are more prepared for each rehearsal.
9. Students have fewer classes and are able to devote more time to each subject. There is still as much homework, but it is focused on fewer classes. Therefore, we have seen better retention of the subject matter as well as less stress on the student.
10. This block schedule is the equivalent of an eight period day. This means there is more opportunity for students to take elective courses. For us, it allows us to require all students enrolled in the jazz groups to also be enrolled in a large performing group.
11. Tutorial provides time within the day for individual help and sectional rehearsals.
12. Less scheduling conflicts with singleton classes.
13. Time within the day for *Project Learning* courses like Music Theory.
14. Forces you the teacher to be prepared for your class. You need to re-evaluate your teaching style when teaching in a block schedule. We both feel this has improved our teaching a great deal.
15. Improved communication among the staff.

#### Con's:

1. Because of the rotator schedule, you do not meet with all groups on concert days. However, you can use tutorial time to meet with those groups.
2. Rotating classes causes a loss of continuity, and it takes longer to get acquainted with new students. However, we feel that the more in-depth rehearsal makes up for it.
3. Longer periods, if not planned well, result in restless groups and loss of rehearsal time.
4. Transfer students have a tough time entering the school mid-year. However, as more schools move to the block system this becomes less of a problem.
5. Younger students have a more difficult time staying on task for the entire block. You need to be a little more creative to keep them focused.

In conclusion, if the two of us were given a choice of returning to a tradition six or seven period day or keeping our current schedule, we would choose to stay as we currently are. We are proud of the schedule at Mountain View and feel it works well for us and the rest of the school.

However, we both feel strongly that a straight four block schedule without rotators would have a devastating impact on the music department as well as other electives.

### To Make the Block Schedule Work for You DO RESEARCH

The way to make a block schedule work for you is to do research. Don't hesitate to call us. We have a complete packet about our schedule available through our office for \$10.00. But, don't just talk to us; there are a lot of schools moving to the block schedule, all with different experiences.

### GET INVOLVED!!!

Get on the committee from day one. Make sure that the other teachers and administrators understand the uniqueness of the music programs.

### STAY INVOLVED!!

Don't give up and throw your hands up in despair. Make it work for your program. Get parent and student support. Work for compromise. Be flexible. Listen to other teachers' problems and try to understand them, just as you hope they will understand you.

The block schedule can work for music, *as well as the*

rest of the school. It is coming to most areas whether we like it or not. Therefore, it is our responsibility as music educators to work with the rest of the staff to make it work.

We both believe that Mountain View is a better place because of the block schedule.



*Rick Plants is a graduate of Oregon State University and has done graduate work at Western Oregon State University. He has taught choral music at Mountain View High School in Bend for 20 years. Tom Barber received his BA from the University of Wyoming and holds a MME from Central Washington University. He has also done graduate work at the University of Oregon. He has taught instrumental music in Wyoming; Bellingham, Washington; and in Oregon. He directs the Central Oregon CC Jazz Band and has been at Mt. View High School for 20 years.*

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