

High School Schedule Committee Final Report

Submitted to Superintendent, Dr. Steve Rasmussen, on January 9, 2012.

BACKGROUND

In June of 2011, Dr. Rasmussen, notified the Issaquah School District staff and community of his intention to:

“...look closely at the precious resource of time in our high schools in an effort to design a common schedule for the high school program. We believe such a schedule will allow us to better share resources, consolidate our professional support for staff, and capitalize on our learnings of the last three years.”

-E-mail to staff in June 2011

In a subsequent e-news to the Issaquah Community, he went on to say that this work would begin in August of 2011 “by engaging our staff in conversations that will be the foundation for a community process that will include a committee of principals, teachers, staff, students, and parents. “

All four of Issaquah School District’s high schools: a) Issaquah High School b) Liberty High School c) Skyline High School d) Tiger Mountain Community High School, dedicated staff time during August professional development days to explore ideas around a common high school schedule. Staffs were polled, comments were gathered and conversations were had.

Specifically, staffs were asked to consider the importance of time when planning high quality lessons and how the use of time is influenced by the following variables; discipline area, ability of students, age or grade level of students, size of classes/case load, number of 504/IEP students/ELL students, etc. Likewise, staffs were asked to reflect on the use of non-instructional time, like planning time, WAC time, etc., and the importance of that time when creating meaningful lessons. Finally, teachers were asked about what might be the optimal length of daily class periods and the frequency of student/teacher contact.

The results of those staff discussions can be found on the High School Schedule Committee Website under “[September 21 meeting materials.](#)”

THE CHARTER AND CREATION OF THE COMMITTEE

The high school principals received a charter from Dr. Rasmussen that can be found on the [committee website's homepage](#). The charter directed the work of the committee and its composition. The charter stated that the charge of the committee was:

“To study and design a plan for the common use of the resource of time to effectively improve learning for all high school students, specifically to design a common district-wide schedule for the high school educational program.”

Membership on the committee was set as follows:

1 Principal from each HS (4)

Paula Phelps – Issaquah High School
 Mike Deletis – Liberty High School
 Lisa Hechtman – Skyline High School
 Ed Marcoe – Tiger Mountain Community High School

3 certificated staff from each comprehensive HS; 1 certificated staff from TMCHS (10)

Bill Bistriz, Social Studies – Issaquah High School
 Brandon Fortier, Physical Education - Issaquah High School
 Jodi Carter, Mathematics – Issaquah High School
 Phil Donley, Music – Liberty High School
 Kathy Creveling, Language Arts – Liberty High School
 Mark Buchli, Science – Liberty High School
 Elisabeth Bacon, Librarian – Skyline High School
 Gretel Von Barga, Science – Skyline High School
 Amy Byus, Language Arts, Skyline High School
 Lane Helgeson, Language Arts – Tiger Mountain Community High School

1 parent representing each comprehensive HS: Issaquah, Liberty, and Skyline (3)

Kate Emerson – Issaquah High School
 Tania Issa – Liberty High School
 Kelly Munn – Skyline High School

1 student representing each comprehensive HS: Issaquah, Liberty, and Skyline (3)

Amanda Levenson – Issaquah High School

Neil Chakravarty – Liberty High School

Hamilton Tyler Wasnick – Skyline High School

The total number of committee members was twenty (20). Parent members were solicited using a similar format as the recent bond committee with an application process at the school level. Facilitation of the committee work was the responsibility of Patrick Murphy, the Executive Director of High Schools and co-facilitated by Josh Almy, principal of Beaver Lake Middle School. Other members of the facilitation team included: Jan Leonard, Administrative Assistant for Secondary Education; Dennis Wright, Director of Career and Counseling Services; and Ursula Baba, Special Services Secretary.

The charter stipulated that the committee should approach the task of creating a common schedule by considering the following:

1. The provision of time for instruction should be consistent with how high school students learn.
2. The committee should look at data regarding student learning for the Issaquah School District.
3. A schedule should ensure educational compatibility across Issaquah, Liberty, Skyline, and Tiger Mountain High Schools.
4. A schedule should allow for creative and flexible uses of time.
5. The schedule should be cost neutral.
6. Any schedule must comply with district policies, as well as state and federal laws.

THE FOUNDATIONAL WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

A calendar of meetings was set with five firm scheduled meetings and two additional meetings, if needed. All seven dates were used. The Committee met on September 21; October 5, 19; November 2, 16, 30; and December 14. Meetings lasted two and one half hours from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm. Agendas, mini-summaries, official minutes, and materials for all meetings can be found on the [committee website](#).

The following work map was created to guide the work of the committee:

WORK MAP

- 1) Form a Cohesive Team
 - Establish Group Norms
- 2) Understand Our Charge
 - Charter
- 3) Understand our Parameters/Scope
 - Law/Contract
- 4) Understand the History
 - Archival Record
- 5) Do the Research
 - What more do we need to know?
- 6) Create Criteria
 - Filter for Schedule Proposals
- 7) Develop and Present Schedule Proposal(s)
- 8) Choose One Common Schedule for Recommendation

Part one of the work map was the establishment of working group norms and determining voting procedures. After lengthy discussion, it was proposed and approved by majority vote that the quorum for the committee would be 80 percent (16), no proxy or absentee votes were permitted, and approval from fifteen (15) members was the threshold needed to move forward on issues that required a vote.

Parts two and three of the work map revolved around understanding not only the charter of the committee but also the scope of the committee's work and parameters. Discussions were had about such things as state law, labor agreements, and the financial constraints of any schedule proposal. Chief Financial Officer, Jake Kuper, addressed the committee at the October 19 meeting to answer questions around financial considerations. He answered questions from the group concerning:

- Potential costs involved in adopting a common high school schedule including start-up costs, ongoing costs, staff development and training.

- Transportation and budget concerns
- State mandated hours of instruction per week
- Considerations in regards to the teachers' contract
- Potential impacts on class sizes; use of partial schedules and waivers
- Neighboring school district's schedules

Parts four and five took up a large percentage of the committee's overall work. In an attempt to better comprehend the district's current state, committee members sought out a deeper understanding of the history of the scheduling of high schools in the district. An e-mail depository was established to solicit input from the community in hopes of gleaning the community's perspective around the current high school schedules. In total, 56 e-mails were received and reviewed by all committee members. Authors included students, former students, parents, and staff.

Data requests from committee members and community members resulted in the gathering of various amounts of data for consideration including:

- Staff survey data
- School comparison data
- College entrance expectations,
- State assessment data (EOC, HSPE, etc.) by school
- College destination data by school,
- College remediation rates,
- An updated school comparison data table
- Surrounding districts schedules and student achievement data
- ISD students' elective choices and advance course choices
- Characteristics of improving schools and districts around professional development
- Financial impact of current schedule and potential new schedule
- Percentage of electives by school
- Graduation requirements
- Liberty waiver data
- How many students take full load of classes over four years
- AP/IB results and offerings by school
- Research on time's impact on learning

- CTE offerings, diversity of offerings and participation rates by school
- Music enrollment by school
- Enrollment turnover by school
- College admissions policies

A depository of research articles was created and added to throughout the three and half months of committee meetings. Topic areas covered in the research articles included: a) Advisory b) Block Scheduling c) College Admissions d) Flexible Scheduling e) Schedules and Achievement f) Small School Schedules g) Schedules and Teaching h) Schedules and the Arts i) Time's Impact on Learning. In total, 55 articles were compiled to help inform the work of the committee.

THE EMERGENCE OF THEMES AND THE CREATION OF CRITERIA

Once the foundational work was established, part six of the work map was the creation of criteria that would serve as a filter for vetting any and all common schedule proposals. Prior to the creation of the criteria, themes were identified that had surfaced during the foundational research work done by the committee. Under each theme, the committee generated a list of considerations to be reflected upon prior to the creation of criteria.

The themes that emerged were:

- College Preparation
- Access to Electives
- Student Teacher Contact Time
- Connectivity
- Finances
- Teacher Planning
- Alternative Education

At the November 16 meeting, discussion centered on reviewing the previously established considerations and creating criteria to serve as a filter for future schedule proposals. The agreed upon criteria were as follows:

- 1) The amount of contact time per class per week needs to be the same for all students.
- 2) Periods will be no less than 40 minutes and no more than 90 minutes.
- 3) Students will see their teacher in class a minimum of 3 times a week.
- 4) Student/teacher contact must be a minimum of 250 minutes per week in a class.
- 5) Most students will have an opportunity to access more course options than they currently have/do (more than 6) within the existing school day.
- 6) Each student will have at least one day per week with at least 80 minute periods.
- 7) A minimum of 5 minute passing periods.
- 8) A minimum of a 35 minute lunch period.
- 9) Daily teacher planning.
- 10) Teacher planning time should be at least 16.7 % of a teacher's schedule (1/6).
- 11) Teachers should have a minimum of 20 minutes planning each day.

The criteria were completed and served as the filter for vetting proposed schedules.

SCHEDULE PROPOSALS AND FINAL VOTE

Part seven of the work plan consisted of the committee bringing or developing schedule proposals based upon the agreed upon criteria. It became evident, early in the process, that it was going to be very difficult to find or create a schedule that met both the group's criteria and the parameters set by the committee charter. Therefore it was agreed that a schedule could be considered even if it did not meet all of the established criteria. As a result, the criteria were used to help prioritize schedules by seeing which proposals met more of the criteria than other proposals. This compromise later proved problematic since none of the criteria were weighted in importance by the committee.

At the November 30 meeting, the committee broke into three smaller groups with the charge of developing potential schedule options for consideration. After an hour, each group reported back to the full committee on their proposed schedule(s) followed by discussion and questions from the committee. The three proposals are found under the "[November 30 meeting materials](#)."

Part eight of the work map stipulated that the committee would choose one final common schedule for recommendation to the superintendent. On December 14, the final meeting date, the committee was asked to come prepared to vote on schedule proposals. A member of the

committee commented that he would not support any of the three proposals generated at the November 30 meeting. He noted that the parameters in the charter stated that the committee need only “consider” that a schedule be cost neutral; not that it was required. Therefore he proposed that the committee recommend a schedule that all schools were more likely to endorse; a seven period option. Seven period options had surfaced on other occasions. In each case, the committee eventually moved away from such an option as it seemed to be an insurmountable divergence from our charter’s parameters. A conversation ensued and each committee member was given an opportunity to comment on this new suggestion. While no specific seven period option was voted upon by the group, it was the consensus of the committee that a successful, affirmative vote on the schedule proposals from the November 30 meeting was not forthcoming. Given the parameters of the charter, the committee agreed that it could not reach consensus on a specific schedule to submit to the Superintendent for consideration. Instead, the committee determined that an official statement to the Superintendent should be made regarding the inability to recommend a common schedule in the form of a report out of the committee’s findings.

A slate of major points/issues to be included in the report was generated in small groups and voted on and approved by committee members. It was agreed that Patrick Murphy would develop the report based on the generated bullet points. Those final points that received at least 15 votes of the committee were as follows:

- a. We can do better than our current schedules in our schools and we should explain why we did not reach a common schedule
- b. A 7 period schedule may be a plausible option if teachers teach 5 of 7 for the three comprehensive high schools. (3)*
- c. If resources allowed, we should use the evidence gathered during this process for justification for suggesting a 7 period schedule
- d. Should the schedule change, then graduation requirements may need to be reconsidered, and aligned to the new schedule
- e. Tiger Mountain—should be able to create a schedule that best meets the needs of students served by alternative education.

- f. Since the best option does not appear to be cost neutral, and may take multiple years for implementation, the conversation and action steps, if any, for now, should be taken to the building-level.
- g. Should resources allow for a new schedule to eventually be implemented, details should be considered at the building-level prior to implementation.
- h. If resources allowed in the future, a 7 period schedule should be setup so that all students may access the additional opportunities without personal cost. The district may want to consider a student option for additional periods, but not a forced option.
- i. When implementing a new schedule in the future, we should operate in collaboration with the teacher's association in order to:
 - o Retain high quality teachers.
 - o Provide sufficient planning time
 - o Keep student loads reasonable
 - o Have 4 out of 5 days of regular student contact (5)*
 - o Obtain extended periods of learning time one day per week.
- j. It is likely that any schedule change will come at a cost. Some options would cost more than others. The district should strongly consider the trade-offs across the district before implementing something that might be too costly to other parts of the system (K-8, Maintenance, Transportation, Food Service, etc).

(*Note- the number in parentheses denotes the number of dissenting votes from committee members)

CONCLUSION

As the committee did their theme and criteria work over 3 ½ months, the similarities and the contrasts between the district's high school schedules became clearer.

- Skyline and Issaquah High School have significantly more contact time per class per semester than Liberty (LHS – 63.3 hrs; IHS- 80.7 hrs; SHS- 82.5 hrs).
- Liberty has extended class periods (89 minutes), which none of the other high schools have. The Liberty block schedule allows for more contact time overall in all classes combined, due to fewer transitions between classes during the school day.
- The Liberty schedule provides significantly more opportunity to take more courses over four years than the other high schools. (LHS-32; IHS & SHS – 24)
- The Skyline and Issaquah schedules have teachers and students seeing one another every day while at Liberty it is every other day. Tiger is every day except Fridays.
- Full time teachers at Liberty teach 6 classes, while Skyline and Issaquah teach 5 classes. Tiger teachers teach 6.

- Liberty teachers teach 3 of 4 periods per day. Issaquah and Skyline teachers teach 5 of 6 classes every day. TMCHS teachers teach 6 of 6 with no prep except on Friday.
- Other than Tiger Mountain, all high schools have teacher planning every day. Liberty planning is $1/4^{\text{th}}$ of instructional time and Issaquah and Skyline is $1/6^{\text{th}}$.
- Tiger Mountain has an advisory built into their schedule that the other schools do not.

These points are significant because they highlight some of the reasons why our committee members believed that our current schedules in our schools can be better. These points also highlight the reasons why the committee was unable to recommend a common schedule given the parameters of the charter. Four major areas emerge from the bullet points above and are expounded upon below.

Contact Time

Much discussion was had by the committee around the importance of teacher/student contact time. After a particular discussion on End of Course Assessments as a graduation requirement, the committee acquired a greater awareness of the importance of students being adequately exposed to course content in order to better ensure success on state exams. Related to that topic, the committee sent a question to OSPI specific to time and grade level expectations and course standards. OSPI informed the committee that no formal analysis was completed in any subject around the state learning standards and time; however state committees are mindful of the quantity of content in the standards and the time that schools have to cover the content. Middle and high school test data in the Issaquah School District, along with teacher anecdotal data suggests that less contact time per class at Liberty is an issue. A final criterion set by the committee was that student teacher contact must be a minimum of 250 minutes per week. That equates to 150 hours per school year. State law sets time minimums for high school credit acquisition at 150 hours. Over the last dozen years, Liberty has fallen further below that threshold. While it is possible for schools to offer and reward credit for courses that meet for less than 150 hours, an exemption request is required to OSPI.

In the original selection criteria for a schedule, the committee also stipulated that students and teachers should have contact at minimum, three times per week. In the final vote for this report, it was increased to four times a week. Either minimum is more than the current two

days a week of contact at Liberty High School that is the reality for students and teachers every other week throughout the school year.

While Liberty committee members readily acknowledged concerns about less contact time per class and frequency of teacher/student contact, there was a reluctance to endorse a six period schedule due to its restrictive impact on elective offerings.

Opportunity

One of the greatest strengths attributed to the Liberty schedule by students, staff and parents is the ability for students to explore a wide variety of elective opportunities. Likewise, it has been expressed through focus groups and e-mails, that some Issaquah and Skyline students and families are interested in increasing the number of course opportunities. A final criterion, approved by the committee was that most students would have the opportunity to access more course options. Steps have been taken over the last few years to open up a student's high school schedule (technology graduation requirement in middle school, Northwest Studies in middle school, elimination of pre-requisites, independent health option in middle school allows for more opportunity to take world language for high school credit, expansion of on-line learning opportunities, acceleration opportunities in summer school, zero and seventh hour courses, etc.).

While Skyline and Issaquah Committee members readily acknowledged the desire by some in their community to have access to more course offerings during the school day, there was a reluctance to endorse an 8 period option similar to Liberty High School due to the reduced time of instruction per class and legal requirements for acquiring high school credit. In addition, there was some discussion about wanting to know more about whether or not more class opportunities was desired by most families and students in Issaquah and Skyline and whether that was educationally beneficial to all.

Extended Time Periods

Not all higher level thinking projects, in-depth labs and comprehensive presentations and debates fit nicely into 55 minute blocks of time. The increased periods of learning at Liberty

High School allow for an in-depth understanding of material without the feeling of being rushed when it is necessitated. A final criterion agreed upon by the committee was that all students should have an opportunity for extended learning time at least once a week. Issaquah and Skyline High Schools do not currently have time in their schedule like this. In addition, they also have significantly abbreviated classes on Wednesdays. As shared anecdotally, these shortened periods can be problematic for classes that require a lot of set up or preparation (i.e. physical education, science, music, etc.).

Connectivity/Advisory

A significant conversation ensued during the creation of criteria around the idea of an advisory period. "Connectivity" is one of the Optimal High School Experience guiding beliefs and states that students must feel connected to their school in order to have a high quality educational experience. The importance of students being connected to peers and adults was stressed by the committee, particularly by the student representatives. While an advisory period was not made a part of the final criteria, it was seriously considered. Advisory does currently exist within the Tiger Mountain Community High School Schedule.

Teacher Planning/Class Size/Caseload

All members of the committee agreed that the single most important factor in the school setting for a quality learning experience is the teacher in the classroom. It was voiced that adequate planning time is vital to the creation of engaging, high quality lessons. Any schedule needs to keep this at the forefront of consideration. A final agreed upon criterion was that planning time should be at minimum $1/6^{\text{th}}$ of instructional time. And while it may be a cost savings to increase class sizes, the unfortunate side effect, at times, can be a decrease in teacher/student contact time. Lastly, while increasing opportunity for students could be a benefit, the committee expressed a concern that if that is achieved by increasing caseloads and decreasing planning time, the net effect may be negligible. Any schedule proposal should strongly consider these factors prior to any implementation.