

**Dr. Steve Rasmussen, Superintendent**

Nov. 28, 2012

Board president and members of the board,

***I recommend that Liberty High School, under the guidance of my cabinet and principal Josh Almy, transition to a straight six-period schedule beginning next school year.***

On Nov. 7, we presented information ([www.issaquah.wednet.edu/district/departments/secondary/HSSchedule](http://www.issaquah.wednet.edu/district/departments/secondary/HSSchedule)) showing that the eight-period block schedule decreases Liberty students' instructional time by a year per class over their high-school career compared to students on a six-period schedule. This is inequitable and concerning:

- It is my job to ensure that all our graduates are college and career ready, and I do not believe the eight-period block prepares Liberty students with the same depth of knowledge and skill as their peers.
- Data already indicates a gap in achievement in end-of-course-type assessments such as the Advanced Placement exams, geometry EOC, and SAT. I strongly suspect that this gap will widen as we move toward Common Core Standards with common exams that hold every student and teacher accountable for the same amount of material during the school year.
- Our own curriculum and district common assessments—aligned with Common Core Standards—are structured for courses with a minimum 150 hours of instructional time. In the coming years, the depth of information will require classes with fewer hours to either lower their standards or cover the curriculum at a pace that will place a burden on students to self learn.
- The new Teacher/Principal Evaluation Process will also use these common assessments, putting Liberty teachers at a disadvantage if they cannot cover the entire curriculum.

My recommendation will provide Liberty students at least 160 hours of instructional time per one-credit class. We have discussed the tradeoff of loss of elective opportunities, but my value is to protect core instructional time. Research and decades of experience indicate that time in front of a quality teacher is *the* most important factor for student success. However, I am also committed to providing more ways for students to take a wider selection of classes within the six-period day (see "Addressing the Limits of a Six-Period Schedule" below).

**Liberty Schedule Committee Recommendation: Seven-Period Modified Block**

The Liberty Schedule Committee recommended to me on Oct. 30 a seven-period schedule. While this met one of my most significant criteria—a minimum of 150 hours of class time—it failed another: cost neutrality. By increasing teachers' planning time to two of seven periods, we would have to hire approximately 11 more staff members, equating to a minimum of about \$880,000 per year. As we discussed at the last board meeting, we would expect this to compound when other teachers expect the same increase in planning time:

- To implement a similar schedule at all high schools would cost about \$4.5 million per year.
- That would create a significant inequity in planning time between high-school teachers and all others, who rightfully argue that their instruction would benefit from more planning time (especially when middle-school teachers lead classes for high-school credit). The cost to implement a schedule that adds prep time for all teachers (like in Bellevue) is about \$14.5 million per year.

**Board of Directors**

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Because resources are already stretched to provide current levels of service, implementation of a seven-period schedule at any level would cause reductions elsewhere in the organization. I have a fundamental problem with this type of reallocation. We would be taking money away from *proven* K-12 academic/intervention models for the sake of providing an extra class period to some students, which research shows is NOT a solid return on investment when it comes to learning (see John Hattie's "Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement"). When the board has given me the primary task of making progress on our student Ends, I believe the seven-period schedule would actually be detrimental to the system. We need all our resources to continue our work with quality professional development, new and better-aligned curriculum and tools, embedded teacher support, instructional coaches, piloting of new innovative programs, etc.

*For these reasons, I cannot recommend the Liberty Schedule Committee's seven-period option—even if we did have the millions of dollars to spend on implementation.*

### **Addressing the Limits of a Six-Period Schedule**

I acknowledge that Liberty families—as well as the majority of families across the district—want *optional* opportunities to explore different electives. As such, we have taken steps to open more opportunities for all students to take higher-level courses as well as more electives. We have more high-school credits in middle school (e.g., Northwest History, Independent Health, Algebra, Geometry, Biology...), waiver opportunities (e.g., technology, P.E.), a summer program with enrichment opportunities (e.g. Forensics Camp, Video Production, Basic Construction, Food and Fitness, Biology ...), an in-progress comprehensive online program, burgeoning creative offerings such as hybrid online/in-person classes that award one full credit per semester, and more.

Our students can enter high school with as many as three high-school credits, two graduation requirements, and two state EOCs met; beginning with the class of 2019 (current sixth-graders), this will bump up to one additional high-school credit and one additional EOC.

*I still want to do more, especially with my recommendation to move Liberty to a straight six-period schedule. Therefore, my recommendation includes these steps:*

- Pilot a program next year to provide busing for seventh-period electives at all of our high schools, if enrollment warrants. To continue the strategy of "double-dosing" at Liberty, I encourage several of these seventh-period offerings to be academic support/acceleration-type classes.
- By February 2013 (when we release the catalog for incoming freshmen), explore how to allow more credit for outside online courses while maintaining the integrity of the Issaquah School District diploma.
- Determine how to provide additional staff at Liberty, as needed, to mitigate the impact on electives during the transition.

### **Summary**

*This process has been ongoing through many years and many committees, all focused on sound educational practices for all students. Ultimately, after reviewing the data and reorienting our system to hold all students and teachers accountable for common learning and assessments, I am recommending the straight six-period schedule for Liberty. At the same time, I will take concrete steps to ensure that Liberty and all of our secondary students have more opportunities to take core and elective classes in their high-school schedule.*

Sincerely,



—Dr. Steve Rasmussen, Superintendent