

Block Schedule FAQ for Middle School Parents

Q: What is a block schedule?

A: An infrastructure that schedules fewer classes per day for longer periods of time. The two most common forms of block schedules are the 4x4 Semester Block and the Alternating Day or A/B Block.

Q: How will the UMS Block be structured?

A: UMS will adopt an alternating day or A/B block schedule. Students will attend eight classes over two days or four classes per day. Each class will run for 82 minutes. Students will have a 60 minute lunch/flex period every day. See a sample schedule below.

HR 8:08 8:13	A Day	B Day
Block 1: 8:13-9:35	LA	Math
Lunch/Flex (8): 11:03-12:03	Social Studies	
	Elective: Band	H/PE

Q: Why is UMS looking to change from the traditional 8 period day to an A/B block schedule?

A: We believe there are great benefits for students, teachers and parents.

A: We believe the traditional schedule of the past 100 years does not necessarily fit with modern methods - limiting students learning and hindering school climate.

A: The block schedule best reflects our district and school vision; prioritizing curriculum, collaboration and climate.

A: The block schedule is a more effective use of time, allowing for best instructional practice and better response to student's needs.

Q: Will my child be scheduled for all core academic classes to meet on the same day?

A: No. Schedules will be balanced so that each day includes both core academic and elective periods. This balance will create staggered due dates for assignments and assessments.

Q: What are the benefits for students?

A: Additional instructional time is created to meet curricular demands.

A: Academic support opportunities are added for all students (FLEX). This will allow students to receive ubiquitous intervention and enrichment from their teachers within the school day.

A: Preparing for fewer courses each day will help manage “curriculum overload”; creating staggered due dates and reducing *STRESS*.

A: The fast pace of our school day is significantly slowed down leading to improved climate.

A: Students will gain a deeper understanding of content.

A: Stronger student:teacher relationships are formed.

A: Smoother transition *from* elementary and *to* high school.

Q: How will block scheduling benefit instruction?

A: Extended, uninterrupted class periods allow teachers to implement best practice; accounting for various learning styles and delving deeper into content.

A: Active learning environments are fostered; allowing for more hands-on, student centered, technology infused activities within daily lessons.

NOTE: The Student Engagement & Satisfaction Survey administered in December 2013 indicated that many students are not engaged in class because there is little time for “hands on” instruction and teachers have difficulty meeting their personal learning styles.

Q: What are the benefits for parents?

A: There will be more opportunities to conference with teachers and teams.

A: The alternating day schedule allows for better communication between class meetings. Students can get assistance from their teacher before the next class meets.

A: “Family time” can increase with reduction of daily course load and increased time for academic support within school day.

A: Your children will like school better!!!

Q: Is there research that supports the effectiveness block scheduling?

A: Yes. Research and cumulative empirical evidence in “landmark” position papers and research literature including; *This We Believe* (Assoc. for Middle Level Education), *Turning Points*, *Transforming Middle Schools* (Center for Collaborative Education), and *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14* (Wood, C.) confirm that block scheduling contributes to improved climate, increased academic achievement and better overall development for middle level students.

Q: What is FLEX?

A: This 30 minute (minimum) period of time for every student is adjacent to their lunch period. The time is meant to be flexible with a variety of meaningful experiences available so that students can get “what they need.” Opportunities to meet with teachers for support (intervention or enrichment), utilize resources in media center, Advisory lessons, and social & physical activities are all daily options which will be made available.

Q: Can 7th and 8th graders stay focused for 82 minutes?

A: Absolutely. Traditional lessons are transformed into workshops and broken up into creative, engaging, student centered activities.

Q: How are we preparing teachers to be successful teaching in the longer block?

A: Our middle school faculty has embraced the philosophy of transforming their classrooms into active learning environments with student centered, hands on activities within daily lessons. To use block classes successfully, we must teach differently than we do in a traditional 47 minute class. Professional development for appropriate lesson design, instructional strategies, curriculum revision and classroom management have been provided and will continue through implementation next year.

Q: What if my child misses a day of school? Will they fall further behind since class meets in a block every other day?

A: No. First off, they will only miss some classes, not all classes. As for the classes they do miss due to absence, we believe the teacher accessibility for extra help during the Flex period will make it easier to get caught up than students currently experience.

Q: Will students have unit lunch and study hall like MHS?

A: No. We will continue to serve lunch over four separate eating periods. Students will eat with approximately 200 classmates from their team and grade level.

A: Study hall for students to complete homework will be made available during the daily 30 minute Flex period. Other academic options such as silent reading, use of media center and receiving support from teachers will also be made available during this time.

Q: What happens to the schedule if there is a weather related cancellation?

A: To maintain continuity of instruction, the schedule will resume where it left off. If we missed an “A” day due to weather, we will return to school for an “A” day.

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: Attend our parent presentation on February 4th at 7pm in the UMS Media Center. Information will also be shared at our Rising 7th grade parent orientation on February 26th.

A: Visit our Block Schedule page on the UMS website for articles, research and parent presentation powerpoint.