

Technical Assistance Paper

309500

Block Scheduling for Exceptional Students

The following questions and answers are intended to assist district staff who are implementing block scheduling for the remainder of the 1996-97 school year. It is anticipated that many of the issues listed in this paper will be resolved when the new Exceptional Student Education (ESE) funding model is implemented.

1. What is block scheduling?

Block scheduling is a term given to a form of scheduling classes for students which extends the traditional class period or time allotted to a particular subject. There are many different types of block schedules including alternate day or week schedules and semester, trimester, or quarter plans. This type of scheduling is intended to allow flexibility for schools to deliver instruction to accommodate the varying needs of all students.

2. What are some of the advantages of block scheduling?

Participants in block scheduling report that longer class periods offer more time to accomplish all the goals of a certain subject including lab work, discussion, projects, or other activities to enhance learning. More student-centered or hands-on activities often result from this process. Instruction is often less fragmented and more personal when students and teachers interact with fewer people each school day. Some districts have reported fewer discipline problems and more opportunities for mainstreaming students with disabilities. In many forms of block scheduling, students report that the stigma of being “pulled-out” for ESE services (and fear of missing something in the classroom) has been reduced because all the students go to different locations after the lecture period.

3. What are some of the disadvantages of block scheduling?

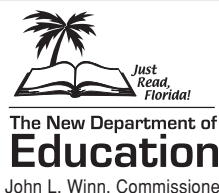
Educators disagree on whether student achievement has increased and discipline problems have decreased when using block scheduling. The amount of work missed if a student is absent from class is also a concern. District staff have reported that training may be needed for teachers who are accustomed to lecturing for the entire period to adjust to the new system where there now may be a 90-minute (or longer) session for each class. Planning time and opportunities for teachers to meet together may be reduced. Scheduling is often very complex. Concerns about how to write Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and Educational Plans (EPs) when using block scheduling have also surfaced.

4. How should block scheduling be addressed on an IEP or EP?

It is important that the amount of special education and related services and initiation/duration dates for the services be clearly written on the IEP. It may be necessary to break this information out into sections for each block of time to specify the type/amount of services, courses, etc., if it will vary throughout the year or to convene another IEP meeting to incorporate the new information.

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