

Block Scheduling - Frequently Asked Questions

What is block scheduling?

Bishop Kelley utilizes the 4x4 block. Students attend four classes per day. Each class lasts 85 minutes; passing periods are 10 minutes. Students attend the same class every day for nine weeks (a quarter). Traditional year-long classes (English, math, foreign language, science, etc.) meet for two consecutive quarters (a term). Theology, computer, communications, fine arts, physical education, and some core electives meet only one quarter. A quarter class earns one-half unit of credit. A term class earns one full unit of credit. Some Advanced Placement courses last three quarters and students earn one and a half units of credit.

Why does Bishop Kelley prefer block scheduling?

The block offers students a number of advantages:

- ** Students have the opportunity to take a wide variety of courses; there is plenty of time to fulfill all graduation requirements and still enjoy elective classes that enrich a student's education in areas of preference.
- ** Students have fewer courses at one time allowing them to concentrate more on the subjects they are taking. This also results in fewer tests, projects, and papers which could come due at the same time. This, in turn, lessens the stress on students.
- ** Students spend less time in passing periods and more time in instruction each day. Fewer classes means less time for administrative tasks such as taking roll, fewer teachers with their own sets of requirements, and fewer total homework assignments.
- ** Students in classes such as art, science, and physical education spend less time in setting up and cleaning up and more time on art work, lab experiments, or physical activity.

The block offers teachers a number of advantages which enhance student learning:

- ** Teachers have a maximum of 75 students in any one quarter which allows teachers more time to work with and evaluate each student.
- ** Teachers have only 2 or 3 preparations each day rather than the 4 or 5 in traditional formats. This allows teachers to better prepare for each class.
- ** Allows teachers a broader range of teaching strategies since class periods are longer. The use of audio-visual aids, group projects, simulations, experiments, and other such activities require longer periods of time. A longer class period allows for these to be utilized more in addition to direct instruction, lecture and discussion.

Doesn't block scheduling make it difficult for a student who is absent?

Yes and no. While students do miss significant material each day when they miss class, the student does have the advantage of fewer classes for which they have to make up assignments. Additionally, students who have a serious illness or accident and are forced to miss for an extended period of time find that they can afford to cut back classes for a quarter and still graduate on time. Students in this situation or students who fail a class can often reschedule that class for the same year, thus staying with their classmates.

Doesn't block scheduling cause retention problems for those in foreign language?

Teachers review at the beginning of the course as needed and continue to review concepts and vocabulary from lower levels all during the term class. Students may choose to enroll in two foreign language classes in the same year. A student could actually complete 4 units of a foreign language in two years. A student particularly interested in foreign language could complete 4 units of 2 different foreign languages in the four years. Quarter "conversation" classes, which may be taken as an elective, also help fill the "gap" for some students.

Does block scheduling hinder students in mathematics? Do they experience a "gap"?

Math textbooks always begin with a review of math skills learned in previous classes. The students retain more than they think they will; usually, they just need to be reminded of what they have learned. Many science classes require use of math skills. More than half the 9th graders take math for the full year. So, there really isn't the "gap" some think there will be. The summer math packet also helps students fill that gap with a review of material learned.

Do Advanced Placement classes suffer from the loss of a year-long class?

Many Bishop Kelley AP classes last for three quarters, which is actually more class time than the traditional 55-minute period for a full year. Those AP classes which do not meet during May when the exams are given hold review sessions for those exams. The pass-rate (a 3 or better on a 5-point scale) remains high - almost 80% of all students taking Advanced Placement classes score a 3 or better- thus potentially earning college credit.

Have standardized test scores been adversely affected by block scheduling?

No. Block scheduling has neither increased nor decreased our standardized test scores. The reasons for going to block scheduling had nothing to do with raising test scores. The other advantages already stated were the primary motivators. Our ACT composite is at an all-time high.

How does block scheduling affect students who experience difficulty learning?

The fewer classes for which they are responsible allows them to concentrate their efforts more in their core subjects. Students who fail a class are often able to repeat the class immediately, thus improving their chances for success.

Can students sit still an 85-minute class period?

Students are not asked to "sit still" for an 85-minute class period. The emphasis on brain compatible learning strategies adopted by Bishop Kelley, along with training faculty have received and will continue to receive, have helped teachers to develop teaching strategies that involve active learning by students. Teachers generally provide for at least 3 different activities during any one class period. Teachers provide mechanisms for students to stand and stretch during that time - by moving to group activities, by getting up to turn in or pick up materials, or even by taking a one-minute stretch break. Students actually report that they feel the day goes faster.

Does block scheduling allow students to finish graduation requirements early?

Bishop Kelley does not recognize early graduation. Seniors who have taken a full load of core classes each year often find they have time during their senior year to take advantage of options such as Career Internship or Concurrent Enrollment. These options allow students to get the full benefit of four years at Bishop Kelley, while keeping students from the feeling they are wasting time. Both of these options have proved beneficial to our students.

How does block scheduling impact the amount of homework students have?

Students have homework for a maximum of four classes per day. In reality, most students will usually have one non-homework class such as athletics. Although the length of time it takes a student to complete a homework assignment will vary with each student, teachers are asked to assign about 30-45 minutes of homework for each class each day. In some classes that will be a specific assignment. In other classes that may be time devoted to studying for tests or long-term projects. Honors and Advanced Placement classes will require more homework. AP students should count on one to two hours of homework each night for each Advanced Placement class