

# Teachers, students protest scheduling proposal

## Class choices for blocks is top concern

BY MELODY GUYTON  
STAFF WRITER

Almost three months after a hybrid block schedule was passed for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City high schools, teachers and students are voicing concerns about which classes might be affected.

Sherri Martin, director of secondary education for city schools, said several concerned teachers have expressed opposition to the district's proposal on which classes should be blocked — sent out in January.

"I thought it would be nice to have an extra period," said Alena Steen, a member of Chapel Hill

High School's block scheduling committee. "But now they're trying to make it totally blocked. They just have an underhanded way of going about it."

English, science, history and career technical education classes now are slated to be blocked half-year courses, while Advanced Placement classes, math, exceptional education, electives and a few others will remain yearlong.

Jason Curtis, a physics teacher at Chapel Hill High, said that setup is inappropriate, specifically plans to block physics, a math-based science.

"Math is half of my class, and they've said that math is best taught in the traditional schedule," he said.

"Learning is best done in small chunks. Seeing (students) a little every day is most beneficial," he added.

The hybrid schedule — designed as a compromise between the existing schedule of six 50-minute periods and an extra, optional period before classes start and a four-by-four block schedule — was approved Dec. 16 after much debate.

The schedule will be made up of seven 50-minute periods. Some of these periods can be combined to make 100-minute blocks, lasting for a semester or a year.

Concerns like Curtis' have been

at the heart of the opposition, coming mostly from Chapel Hill High.

Other concerns included potential loss of class time, complications caused by student absences, diminished minority achievement, students' waning attention spans and decreased material retention.

Sheila Wilkerson, a Chapel Hill High chemistry and environmental science teacher, noted that performing laboratories will be a challenge with blocked classes.

"We do lots of labs with plants, and each lab takes about a month," she said. "Over 180 days, we can do it, but over 90 days, we cannot."

Many students also are against the schedule change.

Catherine Kastleman, a member

of Chapel Hill High's block scheduling committee, said she does not know of any students who want to abandon the traditional schedule.

"I'm just worried how students will function in a class where you just sit for an hour and a half," she said.

Despite its constituents' concerns, Bert Wartski, a science teacher at Chapel Hill High, said the administration has been unresponsive.

"We're fighting for what we believe is right, what will be best for our students, and they're calling us obstructionists," he said.

But East Chapel Hill High School teacher Neal Mullis said the school generally has been accepting of the new scheduling. "I'm kind of angry at the teachers at Chapel Hill

High for fighting it."

The counterproposals now will be reviewed by content area coordinators, who will meet with teachers and make a decision in April on which classes to block.

Superintendent Neil Pedersen, who maintains that hybrid scheduling is best for students, seemed optimistic that the scheduling debate could change its focus.

"We're trying to avoid a repeat of the debate about block scheduling," he said. "We want to move to discussion about implementation and fine tuning because a decision has been made."

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