Transcript of Speakers

III. Case Studies form Schools that Adopted Block Scheduling

D. The Middle Level Hybrid Schedule – Keith Valley Middle School

*Block Scheduling at the Middle Level*

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN  Hello, my name is Chris Coleman. I am the former principal of Keith Valley Middle School, and I’d like to explain and speak to you today about the block scheduling program that the teachers at Keith Valley Middle School implemented two years ago. I was an administrator at Keith Valley Middle School for four years, two years as an assistant principal and two years as principal. During those four years, I worked very closely with the staff to begin the block scheduling program. This is the third year. Later on in the presentation, we'll hear from the present principal, Mr. Neil Evans, who will be giving you an update as to how things are working. Just some introductory remarks. I'd like to say that the move to block scheduling is an intensive process which requires time, planning, and considerable effort on the part of teachers and administrators. And because of the diversity in school districts and their respective goals, the process that each school district will use in their planning will also vary. There is no one-size-fits-all; any reform must be shaped for the individual schools and the communities. It's important to understand that no change will work unless teachers buy into the concept and also are trained how to alter their methods of instruction accordingly. Prior to the implementation of block scheduling at Keith Valley Middle School, we operated under a traditional seven-period day with an extended morning and afternoon homeroom period of 25 minutes each. Teachers and administrators studied a variety of scheduling options with a move towards increasing academic time and an overall more effective and productive use of seven hours for the students. I'd like to just highlight some of the areas that block scheduling hopes to improve.

*Reasons to Move to a Block Schedule*
BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN  Clearly, one of the major impetus for going to block scheduling is to provide longer blocks of instructional time that will allow teachers to use a variety of instructional approaches. Also, another benefit of block scheduling is that it allows teachers to work with smaller numbers of students each day for each time so they can better attend to students’ instructional and developmental needs. Prior to our new schedule, teachers taught five classes. Some teachers taught six classes. Their student load was anywhere from 125 to up to possibly 175 students per day. With the present schedule, they teach three academic classes, and they have a student load that does not exceed 90 students. Block scheduling also promises to reduce discipline problems that occur when students move from one class to the next. Keith Valley Middle School is a large middle school. We presently have approximately 1,300 students. Under the traditional system, we were moving students approximately 10 times a day. That’s the seven periods with two homerooms and also at lunches. So a block schedule will allow for a more orderly organization in the moving of students around the building. We also wanted to increase the amount of available instructional time by reducing the number of class beginnings and endings. In other words, setting up and cleaning up—getting started and concluding. Block scheduling has been particularly successful with physical education classes and also with creative arts classes. Also, we wanted to allow teachers and students time to focus their attention on fewer subjects. Teachers teach three classes a day and have possibly three preparations, although that is rare in a middle school. Most teachers are able to have two, perhaps an accelerated class and then another class. And it also allows students to focus their time and energy on three academic subjects. The fourth block that we have here at Keith Valley for the teachers is their preparation block. The fourth block for the students is their physical education or their creative arts class. And later on, I’ll explain in detail the exact arrangement of the blocks here. We also wanted to provide students with more time and more opportunity to understand challenging academic material. In addition to engaging in a number of different activities within an extended instructional period, to facilitate active student participation and hands-on activities and to continue to have and to improve upon our team teaching and co-teaching and instruction within the traditional subject areas. We operate under a team concept here at
Keith Valley, and we wanted to ensure that the schedule that we adopted would continue to enhance and to support that.

The Major Components of the Middle Level Hybrid Schedule
BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN I'd like to review with you the major components of the scheduling that we have here at Keith Valley. Ours is probably what you would consider a hybrid schedule. We have 80-minute classes of although later in the presentation, you'll hear from a student, Nicole Murphy she erroneously refers to them as 90 minute classes. So they are, in fact, 80-minutes long. But our schedule combines yearlong classes. It also combines the A/B, the alternative day classes. And it also combines what is referred to as the semester schedule for certain subjects. So our four 80-minute block, and we just allow teachers to assign to curriculum priorities to capitalize on many opportunities. And teachers endeavor to change the learning activities every 20 to 30 minutes in a class. In regard to the curriculum, students take three academic classes daily. They alternate health and physical education with creative arts. That is what is called the A/B part of a day, or part of the schedule. We begin the morning announcements by saying if it's a A day or this is a B day. When the students receive their schedule it will imitate that A is health and physical education, and the B day is a creative arts class. The creative arts classes that students take revolve around four areas—some teaching science, technology, art, and music. Teachers teach three blocks daily, or what would be the equivalent of six traditional classes. Math meets for 80 minutes. Our math meets all year long with one exception and that is the eighth grade, and it meets only for three marking periods.

Using a Team Teaching Approach
BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN We have interdisciplinary teams. We have a team teaching approach here at Keith Valley. Our teams are a group of grade-level teachers who together represent more than one subject area, and who share the same student space and schedule. Students are assigned to one of three teams per grade. A typical academic team will consist of English teacher, math teacher, science, social studies teacher. We also have a team
coordinator for each team. All grade-level teachers and all teachers on the same team share a common 80 minutes planning time. During these team meetings, teachers diagnose individual student meetings. They conduct special events. They conduct parent conferences. They provide staff development. They meet with administrators, counselors, or other support staff. We also have as part of our schedule what is called directed study. Under the previous schedule, we had a 25-minute homeroom in the morning, and then we had a 25-minute homeroom in the afternoon. What we have done is we have condensed, really, that time into to what we call directed study, which is scheduled immediately before or after lunch. The students are assigned to one of three large group instructional areas. The teachers do not have any instructional assignments while the students are in directed study. Therefore, this allows the student time to return to the classroom for individual help and to return to a classroom, perhaps for group instruction, to go to the library, to meet with a counselor, to make up tests, engage in independent study, special seminars, or even peer tutoring. We also schedule our band and chorus rehearsals during the directed study. And our band and chorus teachers work very closely to coordinate that schedule because frequently students who are active in the band are also active in chorus. Days that they do not have a band or a chorus rehearsal, then they are free to meet with teachers for some extra help.

*Schedules Differ by Grade Level*

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN I’d like to go through each grade level and explain exactly how that schedule works. We have three grades here; grades six, seven, and eight. For a sixth grade student, homeroom begins promptly at 8:00. It ends at 8:10. And then the first academic block begins at 8:13 and runs until 9:33. The sixth grade students have one language arts teacher, and they will have the same teacher and this block throughout the entire year. They will also have a math teacher for the entire year. They have a full 80-minute block of language arts and a full 80-minute block of mathematics. Then they will have an A/B block of time on their schedule. An A day perhaps being for physical education; a B day for creative arts class. Now, we have four marking periods here at Keith Valley. During marking periods one and four, the first and last marking periods, all students take 80 minutes
of physical education. During the winter months, when indoor facilities—or I should say when outdoor facilities are not available because of the weather then we offer health to the students. So during the second and the third marking periods, they split that block; and they have health for part of the time and they have physical education for the other part of the time. The sixth grade students have two academic blocks; and then their third academic block is 11:00 until 12:23. That's when they're in physical education or creative arts. And that would be the planning time for the academic teachers. They then have the latest lunch, which is 12:26 until 12:51. They eat together as a grade, and they all have directed study together from 12:55 until 1:23. They end the day with a semester course. They are assigned either to science or to social studies. The science and social studies are 18 week classes that meet for 80 minutes. We've also made the last block of the day longer than the other blocks because we found at the end of the day we need some extra time to make some announcements, allow students perhaps to see their teacher, visit the library, make a phone call before they leave for the day. Our seventh grade students also have the language arts block for 80 minutes throughout the course of the year. The difference from the sixth grade student in that there are two teachers. He or she will have an 18 week English class; and then the other semester an 18 week reading class with two different teachers. Physical education and creative arts operate under the same scheme. Lunch and directed study also the same. And then the science and the social studies would be 18-week courses. And mathematics is a yearlong course for seventh grade students. The eighth grade schedule is somewhat different from the sixth and the seventh grade. They do have the A/B schedule with the physical education one day and creative arts class for the next day. They do have an 18-week science course and an 18-week social studies course. The difference in the eighth grade is that students do have an 18-week foreign language course. During this class, they have three different languages; six weeks of French, followed by six weeks of German and six weeks of Spanish. At the conclusion of the eighth grade, they select a language for future study at the high school. Now the semester that they do not have a language, they have an English class. And we've made some adjustments also with the math in the eighth grade. You will recall that in the sixth grade they had a full block of language arts taught by a single teacher; in the seventh grade they had a full block of language
arts, although it was a class of English taught by one teacher and a reading class taught by another teacher. In the eighth grade, we have incorporated a nine week reading class. And we have reduced the math offering by one marking period to put this language reading class in. So that the students have some contact with language arts each semester. So one semester a student will have English and math; the second semester the student will have one marking period of math, one marking period of reading. And then foreign language for the fourth semester.

**Establishing Academic Expectations**

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN  In conclusion, I'd like to point out some of the academic expectations that we have for our students. That they will be engaged in learning for longer periods of uninterrupted times, and they will be able to focus on learning with more effective strategy. Our block scheduling plan also reduces fragmentation of instruction and has allowed for school projects, research, and lab experiments to be completed in that period. Later in the presentation, you will hear from a science teacher who will also be more specific on that. This plan also gives teachers more time to work on individual student needs within a class period. And, finally, students will have more time to practice and to consult with teachers on written material, math problems, research projects, and presentations.

**Staff Development Required for the Hybrid Schedule**

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN  One of the very first things that I mentioned in speaking was that it's exceedingly important that teachers be prepared to teach in a longer block of time. We were very aware of that. We had done a fair amount of reading and research prior to this, and we knew that we had to prepare our teachers for this. So we began by forming a professional development team. Two teachers volunteered to be co-chairs, and we set the following goals for our professional team. One was to select outstanding creative instructional type technologies being used in longer of blocks of time and, of course, to provide professional development activities to give teachers the necessary strategies and skills. We also wanted to offer opportunity for the integration of technology for classroom
instructional models. Concurrent with our focus on block scheduling was also a focus on integrating technology into the curriculum. And, finally, we wanted to work closely with our district staff development committee to establish workshops based on professional needs. We sent a memo out to all staff members, and we were very happy at their response. We had every department, and just about every team represented. So we had a system of organization and a system of communication. When we met as a professional development team, everybody was represented.

**Addressing the Concerns of Reluctant Teachers – Part 1**

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN We identified some of the anticipated problems, some of the preliminary concerns that teachers had. Obviously, the very first question that comes up in a teacher's mind is, How are we going to restructure a year plan for a semester course, in the case of science and social studies. And also, How are we going to best restructure a year course and make it, extend it, enrich it, expand it to an 80-minute course. Teachers also wanted to study their units and their daily lesson plans that they had at that time for the effectiveness in an 80-minute block. We also looked closely at the potential learnings that we had identified in our curriculum to make sure that these were included in our daily 80-minute lesson plans for the future. And, of course, one big concern, particularly with the middle school teacher is, How do you keep a middle school students’ attention and maintain his on-task behavior for the entire block? Also, there was some concern about the paper load. Although we had fewer students to deal with, the turnaround time in returning papers to students is a little bit faster. Also, we were a little bit worried about how we were going to survive the strain all right, the potential strain of a longer class period with few breaks; and how to keep our energy level up; and how to keep a positive attitude throughout the day. And, finally, we wanted to continue to have positive relationships with students and also with their parents.

**Addressing the Concerns of Reluctant Teachers – Part 2**
BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN  So we began, first of all on working on those unit lesson plans and also on daily lesson plans. Teachers met across grade levels and also as a department to address that. We used planning guides. Some teachers actually got the calendar for the following year, plotted everything out. At certain dates, what unit they wanted to have covered by a certain time. And we would encourage that very strongly to plan ahead, to set benchmarks and timelines along the way so that you can schedule instruction and your activities as you go along. We also identified the units that were essential to ensure mastery of the important objects and concepts in curriculum. And another thing also was to attempt to put a time limit on how long we thought it would take for individual learning activities in a daily lesson plan and also in the unit lesson plan. And we also built some time into the schedule for flexible time to handle any interruptions, some for reteaching of material, some enrichment, assemblies, and possible field trips.

**Recommendations for Schools that are Transitioning to Block Scheduling**

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN One of our recommendations would be that the first year of block scheduling to minimize interruptions of all kinds, to make the commitment of the staff to keep students in classes, and also for the administration to make a commitment of a duty-free planning period for teachers. In terms of unit planning instructions, restructure the minutes in terms of 80-minute segments. And do not be lulled into thinking that an 80-minute class simply turns into two 40-minute classes and putting them together. They are not. The breaks are different. Students can complete more complex activities in a longer block. We also thought that it was important to identify unit objectives and to give them to students. We found that very helpful also. Frequently, if you go into another class at Keith Valley Middle School, you will find that teachers have written daily objectives on the bulletin board or on the front board so that students have an idea of what awaits them in that 80-minute class. Essential also is a variety of activities to achieve each objective of each set of related objectives, and also to address the variety of learning styles that you have in a classroom. It's also as important to give students the opportunities to use what they learn. And we also considered and looked at the kinds of assessments and the kind of feedback that we need to
give to students. Assessment needs to be more frequent in the block; perhaps not quite as formal as the more traditional. That's also—we do some form of assessment. Consider the paper load. Try to schedule the essay tests or the extended project assignments that you assign so that as a teacher you are not overwhelmed. And, also, from a student's standpoint and from a team perspective, the team can also coordinate any long-term projects that students are working on, so that they also do not feel overwhelmed by that.

**Daily Planning Suggestions for Teachers**

**BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN** To summarize, I'd just like to leave you with a few daily planning suggestions, and that is to make your objectives clear to students; to outline the day's activities for them, and to have probably at least three activities planned for each daily lesson. Also, with middle school students, you need to consider that they need to move within the room or into another area of the building. Have them move their chairs for quizzes or tests. Let them get up to go get a book or a folder from the shelf, pass papers or books around, move to a lab table, get into cooperative learning groups, go to the library, go to the computer lab. And some timesavers are outlining the day's schedule for students and not having formal breaks. It's not really a good idea that students get into the habit of having a certain time during each class they're going to be allowed to have a break. It's best that you give them the break at a natural pause, or quite possibly that they not even get a break. Also, don't allow students to do homework at the end of class. The end of class really should be used for guided practice for what has been done in class so as to enable them to do the homework easily and efficiently and correctly at home.

**A List of Concerns Expressed by the Faculty**

**BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN** One other thing that the professional development team committee and also that the faculty worked on is that we made a list as we had department meetings, team meetings, professional development committee meetings—we made a list of all of the questions the faculty members, parents, or students had during the course of their planning for this new schedule. And we made sure that we were able to provide an answer to
every single question. That helped to eliminate a lot of anxiety. I just would like to go over some of the concerns that were raised and probably will be raised by most faculties who anticipate moving to one. I just want to point out to try to answer those questions and try to deal with them in some format before you implement. We talked about field trips, assemblies, teacher and student absences, students transferring in and out, early dismissals, lateness, homework, the final examination schedule, report cards, class size, problem teachers who share some teachers between the middle school and the high school, how to use the library, our music program, our evaluation, our creative arts classes; and also when to schedule special services for guidance counselors, speech therapists, using the career center. And we also looked at length of our school day. And, finally, I would recommend to you that you study some of Doctor Robert Lynn Canady's material. He has written some excellent books, and he has some excellent suggestions for teaching in the block.

**Evaluating the Results – Gathering Feedback**

BY: CHRISTINE COLEMAN We wanted to evaluate how the block schedule was working. In the very first year of the block schedule, we completed surveys that we distributed to parents, to students, and, also, to teachers. Once again, a committee of teachers worked on developing the parents' survey. They will be available on the web site for you to see. The surveys consist of approximately 20 to 25 questions with an area for students, teachers, and parents to make comments. Although our results are not final because they are still tabulating some of them. I can give you some indication of what it looks like after the first two years. It has been an overwhelmingly positive experience according to the surveys conducted over this two-year period. Teachers, students, and parents found the transition very smooth and encouraging. We collected seven areas from the question and answer inclusion in the report. These areas are: curriculum and subject matter; teacher effectiveness; technology; teacher/parent communication; learning effectiveness; directed study, creative arts and physical education; and the general effectiveness of block scheduling. The response from parents was remarkable. The parents thought that the schedule was beneficial to their child's education. They believed that the schedule allowed students to explore the curriculum in real
depth and permitted them to be involved in more active learning situations. They also found that managing three academic subjects was less stressful for the students and they include the directed study period and the availability of teachers at that time allowed them to seek additional help that they needed. In terms of attendance, our attendance rate here at Keith Valley Middle School is excellent. We found that there was no appreciable increase or a decline in our attendance. On any given day, approximately 96 percent of our students do come to school. That's one area though that would be hard to quantify it would be to what degree do the students enjoy school. And it is my perspective that with the block schedule and with the attendant changes in instructional strategies and the course offerings and the organization of the day that our students are enjoying school and are enjoying learning more. With regard to the honor roll, honor roll did increase at the middle school. We have two honor rolls here—we have a distinguished honor roll and we have a regular honor roll. The distinguished honor roll is for students who have As in every academic schedule and nothing less than a B in the other subjects—that would be the creative arts courses, health, and physical education. Interestingly enough, we found a significant increase in the number of students who made distinguished honor roll and the number of students who were able to get all As in their academic subjects. And we attribute this to the fact that they were focusing on three subjects. In our standardized test scores, in Pennsylvania we have a state mandate to test students in grade eight in the areas of the reading and also in mathematics. We found that the scores have been up one year in math and stayed the same the next year; they went up one year in reading, dipped a little bit the following year. But it's important to understand with standardized test scores, in particular these kinds of tests, that we are not testing the same students each year. We have a different eighth grade class that we were testing.

**Frequently Asked Questions about Block Scheduling**

**BY:** CHRISTINE COLEMAN In conclusion, I'd like to address some of the most frequently asked questions that we've received from middle school teachers, students; also, parents and administrators. As a former teacher and one who taught under a traditional schedule, where classes were 45 minutes and then they were changed to 80-minute classes, the very first
concern, the immediate concern that I had when I first started with block scheduling was if I would be able to productively sustain 80-minute classes. What you will find is that planning for an 80-minute class is completely different from planning for shorter classes. It is a unique educational opportunity. It is not two short classes combined to one. It must be planned as a coordinated unit. If you keep in mind that the planning in your class must be driven by the content with a daily topic dictating activities; and if you approach each class as in the spirit of a fresh beginning, I think that you will not have as many problems as you may think that you might have. Another question that people generally ask is, Will block scheduling solve all attendance problems. It will not solve all attendance problems. However, there are ways to address student absence and also teacher absence. You can be quite creative. We have homework partners at school where each student has a study buddy. If one of the students is absent, then its incumbent upon the other one to make sure that the absent student gets the homework assignment, and he or he may collect books, papers, even deliver it to the student. We have voicemail. Some teachers leave homework assignments on a daily basis on their voicemail. We also have e-mail. Students can e-mail us we freely give out our e-mail addresses for parents and also for students to get information. We also have little corners in each classroom where a student secretary is in charge of filing away any handouts, papers, books, assignments for each day so that when an absent student returns there's something there to go and another student can assist him with that. Another frequently asked question is, Will this cut down on paper load. And I have to go back to the first question and respond by saying that plan, plan, and plan so the tests and papers are not collected on the same day. There is a quicker turnaround with this. You can also become very creative. Have copied answer keys for learning activities, pass them out to students. Have students check their work. Also, don't feel compelled that you have to assign a grade to every single activity that you ask students to do. I alluded to that a little bit earlier on our talk about some informal assessment. Also, we wondered if students will be able to perform effectively in longer classes. And the answer is in some classes with proper planning, with more writing, with covering topics in depth, with group work, and in planning a variety of activities. Another frequently asked question is, Will lower level students find the long classes too difficult.
Interestingly enough, the answer is a very strong no. They will not find the classes too difficult. They will find that with reluctant learners that the variety of activities that are offered in the classroom assist that student in learning. We also found that these students enjoy the longer block of time because they don't have to collect their things and move around every 45 minutes to a new set of instructions, adjust to a teacher, find homework assignments for five different classes. In terms of the reluctant learner who frequently fall into this category, some recommendations that teachers made is that we try to learn the interests and goals of these students; try to touch base with that student on a personal level—and that's one of the things that an 80-minute class will allow you to do; to guide them rather than to command them; and, again, to the vary activities. Use visual/audio activities, cooperative learning, and problem solving, bring resource speakers, outside speakers, into the classroom. Finally, the last question that we get has to do with homework. And in that an 80-minute class isn't necessarily two 40-minute classes together, homework does not necessarily mean doubling the amount of homework. But while they're varying the kind of homework, we try to make sure that students are reading something each night and that they are studying, perhaps for a quiz or even for a test. The assignments should be important assignments, they should be relevant assignments; and very important is to write the assignment on the board, especially for a middle school student. And we, as part of a team on an academic team, be aware of what's going on in the student's academic life, try to coordinate projects, long-term assignments so that there isn't too much stress and strain for the student. I'd like to introduce now the present principal at Keith Valley Middle School, Mr. Neil Evans. He inherited the block schedule. This is the third year that Keith Valley has used a block schedule, so it will be interesting to hear his reaction, his perspective. You're also going to hear from a science teacher, a veteran science teacher, who's been teaching about 28 or 29 years, Mr. Ron Reichard. He is also our science coordinator here at Keith Valley Middle School. He has taught in a traditional 45-minute class; he has taught middle school; he has also taught high school; and he can provide some viewpoint on a class that meets for 18 weeks, such as is the case with science and social studies. You will also meet a parent who has a sixth grade student here. And for those of you who are familiar with the transition from the elementary
school to the middle school, you can certainly appreciate the great anxiety that the parents experience when the children leave the elementary school and go to the rather large middle school. And then finally, we'll close with some remarks by an eighth grade student, Nicole Murphy, and see what she has to say about us. Here's Neil.

A New Principal's Perspective on Moving to Block Scheduling

BY: NEIL EVANS Hello. My name is Neil Evans. I’m the principal at Keith Valley Middle School. This is my first year involved in the block scheduling. I have been involved in middle school education for 20 years as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. As a middle school principal, one of the key areas that I believe block scheduling gives us is the advantage of flexibility in our classes. The teachers have reported to me that they feel more comfortable a lot more times to work on their academic subject areas as well as in the creative arts and phys ed departments. Flexibility is the key, I believe, in middle school education. The teachers feel that they can use that time in a variety of different ways. The teachers have reported to me that they don't feel rushed. I have had experiences before in 45-minute blocks of time and felt that the teachers were frustrated because they had to stop classes early. In block scheduling, they have a great deal of opportunity to combine the block, if they'd like, in a team concept which is very important. And they're able to take different times and work it out together in the best interests of the children. The phys ed teachers have told me that they feel a lot more comfortable not having to rush in the classes. We see less time for students to be walking around in the hallways. It cuts down a great deal on discipline problems. We see that there are a lot of opportunities for kids in our directed study to go back to teachers and talk with teachers. We also have had the opportunity create times within that block for remediation and enrichment for our students. So there are a lot of different advantages that we found in our block scheduling. One of the other opportunities that we have and one of the advantages of block scheduling is that during our directed study, which is a block of time in the middle of the day, we've also been able to incorporate our band and chorus into that slot. That's a great advantage because it doesn't take time away from our academic areas. It doesn't have to be put at the end of the day or the beginning of the day. It allows for the band and
chorus to meet at a set time. It also gives flexibility, once again, for students to go back with their teachers that are in the classrooms at that time, who are assigned their classes at that time, to get through academic work.

**Teaching Science in a Block Period**

BY: RON REICHARD As a science teacher, I really value the new approach concerning block scheduling. I taught in the high school level and the middle school level, and with the traditional method for science you—or I should say myself—I would have a very difficult time trying to complete a unit within the traditional method. Oftentimes what would happen, you would take maybe two to three class periods in order to complete a concept. Example: the concept of angle of insulation. Now, within the block scheduling, what I'm able to do, I'm able to introduce the concept, I'm able to do a pre-lab. Getting to the lab itself, get into a post-lab, enough time to take the students down to the planetarium and do the closure. And in the traditional method, what happened was there's too much of a break. You would find—or I should say—I would find the students—you would take a 45-minute class period, introduce it, maybe not even get into the lab itself, wait another day—when the students would come back, some of them would have to re-review. In this case with the block scheduling what you're able to do is just complete that whole idea, that whole unit. The other thing is makeup work. With the traditional method, it was really very hard for students to make up the work. It would have to be done after school. That would involve their sports time and their extracurricular activities. With the block scheduling, I don't have a problem. The students have that 30-minute time period where we can make up work and, consequently, it's better for them because they're getting it done within a day, not maybe within two or three days because they need a ride home or they're involved in sports. The other aspect of block scheduling that's very important as a science teacher is the interdisciplinary capability. In the case of my situation, math and science are taught, in most cases, one block after another. So what that enables the science teacher and myself to do is to use those math concepts and math ideas. As an example, there's a unit in math where the students learn Excel. And what we do when we have the students are activities that closely parallel the use of Excel. So there's a good
example of interdisciplinary type activities. There are others. Like when you do scientific method, it interrelates with the math. And the important thing is that the students can concentrate on science and math, which complement one another, and really not have to worry about three more subjects. Another important aspect of block scheduling, or comparison to the old traditional method, is assessment. In science, assessments often involve practical applications with lab work. In the traditional method, it was very, very difficult to do that; mainly because the contact. With the block scheduling, you're able to test the traditional way with your written tests; but then you're also to do observational type activities. There's more than enough time to do that. So the assessment capability is so much better than in the traditional method for that.

A Middle School Parent’s Perspective on Block Scheduling
BY: PATRICIA LANG  Hi. My name's Patricia Lang. I'm a parent of a sixth grade student at Keith Valley. My daughter's been in the block scheduling since her second semester. We absolutely love it. She has more time with only three major subjects to do her homework because she has three main content areas that she has to work on. It gives her much more time at home to concentrate on each individual subject. They have more time for projects.

When you have the traditional five major subjects, I found—that's how I went through school; we had five subjects—and it was a lot more difficult. You had less time each evening to work on each individual subject. With this, she's got much more time. In the classroom, they get in, they get started right away, and the teachers seem to have more time. I don't get as many questions at home as I did in the elementary setting—I don't understand this; I don't understand that. And with the longer class period, I think the students are actually getting more out of the teachers rather than bringing it home and asking me to teach it, which wasn't a very good thing. I like it a lot. I think it is wonderful.

A Middle School Student’s Perspective on Block Schedule
BY: NICOLE MURPHY  Hi. I'm Nicole Murphy, and I've been in block scheduling for three years now. And I really like it a lot. It makes the teaching a lot easier on the teacher.
And with that you have three educational courses—or three educational classes—and it makes it a lot easier for the teachers because you have three 90-minute classes. So you get to do a lot more activities. Like you get all of your labs in. You can go to the computer lab. And you still have a lot of time there, and you're not going to get cut short off like you would in a traditional class. I've never experienced a traditional way of scheduling, but I'm assuming from what I've heard that it's a lot more difficult on the students. Because then you have so many more subjects, and, so, you don't get to do as much in class, and you have to teach yourself more. So you get a lot more homework at night, and it makes it a lot easier if you're involved in after school activities and things. And with the longer periods, you can also get extra help from the teacher within the period. But there's a built-in time, which is 30 minutes, and you can go talk to your teacher. You get a pass for that. And that makes it a lot easier because you can get one-on-one help. And also with the 90-minute schedule, there is—you have gym for 90 minutes. And you're not rushing through things. And also with things like creative art, which is art technology classes. And they're all longer, and you're not cut short on them.