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The Cultural Dimension of Structural School Reforms: The Case of Schedule Changes

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THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF STRUCTURAL SCHOOL REFORMS: THE CASE OF SCHEDULE CHANGES

by

Maylén R.R. Sullivan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2024

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ABSTRACT

The four-by-four (4x4) schedule—a type of high school block schedule—presents promising prospects for improving teaching and learning. Using a qualitative, single case study methodology, I investigated a school transitioning from a traditional six-period schedule to a 4x4 schedule during its 2nd and 3rd year of implementation. The study aimed to understand the factors that influenced the transition, the stakeholders’ responses to the decision, and the factors that influenced their responses. Some of the main considerations that motivated the decision included the desire to provide more opportunities within the school day for students to meet A/G college eligibility requirements, allow students to pursue their course interests, and career readiness objectives. The most important factors impacting stakeholders’ responses to the decision were the top-down nature of the decision, a lack of communication concerning the rationale behind the shift, and a lack of meaningful professional development support for implementation of the reform. These factors led to mistrust and teacher resistance. In light of these findings, this study provides recommendations to improve the decision-making processes in the context of school reform.
DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandmother Guadalupe, whose life of selfless service continues to inspire me to help where I can.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Most importantly, I am indebted to all the participants who shared their experiences and provided essential data for this study. Their willingness to give their time to be part of this research has been pivotal in contributing to the findings.

I would also like to thank Sara Henry and her team from Heartful Editor who helped edit this manuscript for APA format.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The U.S. education system has ranked 31st in the world (WorldTop20, 2024), and its K–12 public school system has failed to evolve and adapt with the realities around it (Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Wagner, 2000, 2001), with grave consequences for students. Only 1 of every 10 low-income kindergarten student graduates from college (Darling-Hammond, 2015) and great inequalities have permeated the system, feeding the school to prison pipeline (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Students are not ready for the real world. Even if students graduate, schools are not equipping children with the skills they need to thrive in the world’s new reality (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Students need to know how to address the current and future problems people face as a population on this planet (Weil, 2016). People need to pay attention to the “‘lifeworld’ of the school [not] the ‘systemworld,’” meaning we should “focus on developing social, intellectual . . . human capital rather than concentrating on the achievement of narrow, instrumental ends” (Harris, 2003, p. 321).

If a lack of educational equity and quality are the centerpieces of the challenge people face, many related issues such as (a) a lack of vision about the purposes of education; (b) antiquated bureaucratic top-down structures; (c) deplorable teaching conditions (Darling-Hammond, 2022; Wagner, 2000); (d) lack of effective professional development; and (e) cultures of control, compliance, and complacency constrain the power of the human intellect and spirit inside every individual in the system. All these challenges undermine Dewey’s (1916) dream of a truly democratic education in which all those involved (i.e., teachers, parents, students, school leaders) are able to shape it and be inspired by it.
Dewey (1916) wanted schools to be “sites of inquiry, [guided by a collaborative investigation of] practices through observation, reflection, analysis and dialogue” (as cited in Taylor et al., 2011, p. 922). One may wonder how people can expect students to learn when the system makes it so hard for the people in charge of that learning to engage in such inquiry. Indeed, teachers are isolated (Darling Hammond, 2022; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Taylor et al., 2011) and “feel both powerless and victimized in their isolation” (Wagner, 2001, p. 2). A transformation of the educational system is clearly necessary.

Whereas other nations have enacted considerable reforms in their education systems (Darling-Hammond, 2015), Wagner (2001) argued the U.S. system has become obsolete. Darling Hammond (2022) has also detailed many of the profound transformations needed to ensure all students learn, such as (a) changing how funding is allocated to ensure every school truly gets the resources they need to serve every student, (b) emphasizing relationships and deeper learning, and (c) enhancing teacher training so educators will be better able to support students academically and better respond to their needs.

Many structural reforms such as untracking (Oakes, 1990), year-round school scheduling changes (Worthen & Zsiray, 1994), and an increase in accountability testing (Darling-Hammond, 2010) have been attempted as an ethical imperative to better serve student needs. However, often they have failed due to a lack of vision about the purposes of education and, therefore, a lack of alignment between the consequences of reforms and what people truly want to accomplish as a society. These types of reform have not only been often rolled out inadequately or inequitably (Darling-Hammond, 2010), but also those who have imposed them (i.e., policy makers) have been often too far removed from the classroom to understand the implications of these reforms on how teaching and learning happens in the classroom (Cuban, 2019).
Moreover, these reforms have not often succeeded because they have not impacted classroom teaching nor intervened to improve the culture of learning in schools. Darling-Hammond (1993) argued reform efforts that attempt to standardize instruction and assessment have not been successful because they have not fostered the type of teaching and learning that prepares students for 21st century life—where complex problem framing and solving is the new norm. Likewise, “reforms [dependent upon] uniformity repeatedly fail” (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988 as cited in Guskey, 2002, p. 387).

Cuban (2013) cautioned against putting too much faith in structural reform as a means to improve instruction due the complexity of educational systems. Cuban argued schools and classrooms are too complex for structural changes alone to have any impact on teaching because, among other reasons, debates still exist about what constitutes quality teaching and quality assessment in different disciplines. The intent of many reforms is to improve teaching, which Cuban (2013) argued “is a shorthand for increased intellectual rigor and student-centered classroom practices” (p. 112). However, any changes that have occurred in teaching practice are cosmetic at best. For example, according to Cuban (2013), increasing “small group work, student-directed projects, [and the] use of laptops in daily lesson” (p. 112) have not significantly impacted schooling. Fundamentally, the way schools are organized has remained basically unchanged because of the grammar of schooling (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Cuban (2013) believed both teaching and schools are so complex that the many existing challenges cannot be solved via “structural changes that treat schools and teaching as if they were “complicated” problems” (p. 114). This means when problems are viewed as technical rather than adaptive, then the solutions brought forth follow suit.
One type of structural reform commonly used to improve schools is school schedule changes. School leaders use schedule changes to address student needs, improve opportunities for enrichment and remediation, and, in U.S. high schools, better prepare students to be eligible for college (Queen, 2008; Rettig, 1999). Current research on school schedule change and other high school reform efforts has warned that several factors can benefit or undermine change efforts (Cuban, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Furner & McCulla, 2019; Guskey, 2002; Hubbard & Datnow, 2020; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In general, teachers are the most important education staff member in terms of implementing successful reforms; yet, teachers are not often given the professional development support they need to enact the reform when new reforms are introduced into a school.

In the case of schedule changes, previous research has pointed out this reform has not always led to benefits for students because administrators have not trained teachers in more effective instructional practices to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by innovative schedules (Hanover Research, 2014). Queen (2000) argued for adequate professional development to support educators and to help them buy into, adopt, and implement successful change. For reforms such as schedule changes to be successful, teachers’ involvement in the decision-making process and their capacity to implement the change seems crucial. As Brown and Arriaza (1999) stated, setting up a dialogic decision-making process to successfully manage a change is necessary.

On their own, reforms may not automatically provide benefits to students. Many researchers have stated without cultural reform, structural reform alone does not yield the intended results (Fullan, 1993; Hubbard et al., 2006, 2023). Cultural reform must accompany structural reform and that often means reculturing (Hargreaves, 1995). Fullan (2001) explained
educators need to go beyond the “structure of change” and develop “cultures of change,” so rather than “adopting innovations, one after another, [school systems produce] the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices—all the time, inside the organization as well as outside it” (p. 7). This kind of continual organizational learning, which has also been supported by Senge (2006), can bring about a paradigm shift in the educational system, and namely, in school reform.

The success of any significant structural change rests on the shoulders of teachers, as they are called to teach under a new arrangement (Cerit, 2013; Correnti & Rowan, 2007; Rowan & Miller, 2007). Such change efforts are often challenged by teachers’ beliefs (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016), a lack of teacher self-efficacy (Cerit, 2013), and a lack of adequate support from school leaders (Stewart et al., 2012). Therefore, teachers need to be invited into the conversation so administrators and leaders can understand their beliefs and better support them to implement reform.

According to Hubbard et al. (2023), some of the aspects of the culture of schooling that reforms push up against include teacher autonomy and top-down decision-making processes. The importance of creating cultures of collaboration to promote teacher learning cannot be understated. Much research exists about what does not work (e.g., one-off seminars, decontextualized learning from outside trainers, and summer professional development), but research about what does work is nascent at best. Although researchers put forth many claims and perspectives during the 1990s in favor of collaboration (Friend & Cook, 1990; Gitlin, 1999; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997), convincing evidence has not been provided until recent research by researchers such as Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) and Datnow and Park (2018).
It is in this larger discussion of school reform that I situated the importance of adopting and implementing school change to enhance learning opportunities of all students and the importance of structural and cultural change. Informed by more general research on educational reform, I was interested to follow the adoption and implementation of one schedule change effort to better understand how the presence or absence of leadership actions to create structural and cultural change can influence stakeholders’ reactions to the change.

My study thus dealt with one district in Southern California, in which district level leaders initiated a process in 2018 to change the high school’s bell schedule from a traditional year-long 6-period schedule to a four-by-four (4x4) block schedule. My study consisted of taking a close look at the decision-making process, which lasted about 3 years, and studying stakeholders’ responses to the decision and the factors that shaped their responses. This high school recognized many students were not taking the requisite classes to enable them to be eligible for admission to California universities and wanted to provide more opportunities for college and career readiness. This process began in 2018, and though the official decision was made in 2020, several stakeholders resisted the decision between 2020 and 2021; so, the 4x4 schedule was finally implemented in 2021.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand leadership actions during the process of reform proposal, adoption, and implementation and the ongoing status of stakeholders’ support or resistance to the schedule change. Though too soon to gauge the impact of the new schedule on the students’ educational lives, the decision-making process showed structural change alone—without enough leadership actions to address culture and teacher beliefs—was insufficient to gain full support of stakeholders such as teachers and some parents.
Significance of the Study

As school leaders wrestle with how best to improve education, it is important to understand how, if at all, one structural change—a change from a traditional school schedule to a 4x4 school schedule change—was successful in influencing teacher practice and better supporting students. This study provides important information about the benefits and challenges educators faced in adopting and implementing this reform. It sheds new light onto how decision-making processes influence stakeholders’ acceptance of the new schedule and discusses the various factors that influenced perceptions and behaviors threatening to derail the reform. This study showed the important role of creating dialogue and buy-in (i.e., addressing culture), communicating clearly, and providing professional development in the context of a school rescheduling plan. By looking closely at one school that has transitioned to a new schedule, this study emphasized some important factors that determined how stakeholders supported or resisted the decision. School leaders who are planning to switch to a new schedule can learn how to garner support for and better prepare their staff to implement change.

Research Questions

The main research questions in this study were:

1. Why did the district decide to change the schedule?
2. How did different stakeholders respond to the decision?
3. What factors shaped stakeholders’ responses?

Problem Statement

Over the last several decades, many schools have turned to the structural reform of changing school schedules to create greater opportunities for students and improve teaching and learning. Changing from a traditional, 6-period schedule to a block schedule is one type of
innovation in terms of scheduling. Some studies have also examined schools that have switched from block scheduling to traditional schedules (Gargis, 2013). Whatever the scheduling innovation entails, school leaders may see schedule changes as a vital strategy to better meet student needs.

School scheduling reform in this study was focused on one school that recently transformed to block scheduling. When block schedules replace the traditional 50-minute period schedule, students see teachers for more extended class periods, which implies curriculum changes (Canady & Rettig, 1996; Freeman, 1996). Syllabi, lesson plans, and instructional strategies must be adjusted, and leaders must convince educators that this change best supports students and guide them in the implementation (Bair & Bair, 2010; Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006).

Evidence on the effectiveness of new schedules in improving teaching and learning has been inconclusive. Most peer-reviewed studies conducted on this topic have examined whether schedules improve student outcomes, and the evidence has been inconclusive. Very few studies have dove deep into how decision-making processes for enacting new schedules have been carried out. In fact, most of the current studies have focused on ex-post-facto examinations of the impacts of schedules on student learning (Mizhquiri, 2019). Despite this focus, these types of reforms are common; however, less is known about what aspects of decision-making processes make for successful transitions. By doing a deep dive into a decision-making process of a schedule change, this study contributed insights about the leadership actions that supported stakeholders’ support for (or resistance to) a new schedule. This study focused on the process of reform—as it is introduced, adopted, and implemented into a district—and the factors that supported and challenged such reform. It examined the interactions that threatened to derail the
schedule change and thus provides important information for other educators seeking to change schooling through structural reform.

Purpose of the Study

This study contributed greater understanding about the factors involved when a school district attempts to impose a district-led high school reform. In particular, this case study focused on the events of a scheduling change and attempted to deconstruct the actions and attitudes of educational leaders, teachers, parents, and community members. This study showed how the interactions both supported and threatened to undermine the reform. Most importantly, the study showed the importance of creating reform dialogically, communicating clearly, and providing adequate professional development for teachers. It provided lessons for other districts attempting to implement schoolwide change.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the literature on school reform with a focus on the structural, cultural, and agentic factors that constrain or support different structural reform. I then explore the literature on schedule changes to discuss the purported benefits of different schedules, evaluate what educators know about the effectiveness of schedule reform, and identify some of the factors and key ingredients that may help make school schedule changes successful.

In Chapter 3, I describe my research design, which was a qualitative case study of one school in Southern California in the early stages of implementation of a 4x4 schedule—between its 2nd and 3rd year of implementation. This design was the most suitable for my study because I was able to deeply study the phenomenon and, in so doing, generate insights that other sites in similar situations or with similar contexts could possibly apply. Because schedule changes in schools require complex decision making and success depends on effective professional
development, effective communication, and other factors, case study methodology was appropriate to study this complex phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In Chapter 4—the first part of my findings, I describe the events spanning from 2016–2023 and identify four general phases in the schedule reform. The first phase, lasting from 2016–2018, was one of problem finding in which the district determined priorities via creation of a long-range plan and identified the high school’s schedule as one of the limitations to providing students with more opportunities. The second phase, spanning from 2018–2020, was the stakeholder input phase in which Principal 1 created a teachers’ committee to examine data around student achievement and to design proposals for a new bell schedule, while the district collected information about parents’ desires for their students’ education.

The official decision to switch to a 4x4 schedule was made by the board in May 2020. In the year that followed—also the first year of the COVID-19 global pandemic—a “teachers’ revolt” was organized in what I dubbed the “Revolt Phase,” which brought the decision once again to the board. The board voted to uphold the decision in May 2021, and in the final phase, implementation began in the Fall of 2021. Thus, in Chapter 4, I identify relevant events and administrative actions and present collected stakeholder responses to those actions. I also provide findings for the rationale for the schedule change.

In Chapter 5—the second part of my findings, I more explicitly answer the three primary research questions that guided this study. I discuss the themes related to why decision revolved around providing students with more opportunities, reducing the equity gap, and better preparing students for college and careers. In terms of stakeholders’ responses to the schedule change, there was strong resistance from most teachers and some parents. Some of the factors that led to this resistance included unclear communication about the rationale for the change, insufficient
professional development, and a top-down decision-making process. Finally, I discuss one external contextual factor that played an important role in complicating the decision-making process, namely the COVID-19 global pandemic. The final chapter—Chapter 6—connects the findings from the study to the literature review to provide additional insights and implications for school reform as a whole.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review helps to situate the study of a contested decision-making process, specifically the adoption and implementation of a new class schedule at Sherford High School, in a more general body of knowledge about school reform. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of my search strategy. I then present an overview of structural educational reform in the U.S. educational system and then delve specifically into schedule reforms in particular. I end my review with a closer look at previous research that has detailed some of the key components that have made for successful schedule reforms in the past, such as dialogic decision-making processes and adequate professional development, and then, suggest how some of those factors offer a partial frame for investigating events around the effort to change the schedule at Sherford High School.

Search Strategy

After defining my search categories, I conducted a database search of some of the major educational databases, such as Academic Search Premier and ERIC. I used the following search terms: (schedule change or block schedule or structural reform) AND (teachers or students or teaching or learning) AND (secondary or high school or middle school or junior high). This search yielded over 10,000 hits, so I reduced the results to 177 by incorporating 4x4 schedule or 4/4 schedule into my search terms.

Next, I used Google Scholar and searched the following terms: Structural reform in education, Structural reform in schools, structural reform AND schedule changes AND secondary education, Restructuring AND Reculturing, barriers AND implementation of reforms AND schools, barriers AND implementation of reforms AND schools AND block schedule,
factors AND successful implementation AND schools AND block schedule. I also searched the Copley Catalog for 4x4. The first phase of my search yielded 400 results.

I then decided to focus on articles from 2011 up to 2022 and I ended up with 100 articles and/or books. As I started reading, I eliminated less relevant articles and added others mentioned in other sources and articles recommended by my mentors. I conducted one final search using the noft parameters to narrow my focus on articles that could be relevant for specific parts of my paper, using terms such as “professional development” and “schedule changes.”

**Structural Changes in the U.S. Educational System**

Structural reform has been common in the U.S. educational system. To reform a structure means changing the “buildings, resources, or the way our schools are organized” (Ireland, 2019, para. 1). Oakes (1992) referred to it as a technical change that typically emphasizes changing resources and arrangements. Specific examples of structural reform include changes in grading, school size, and school schedules (Cuban, 2019); new mandated curricula; or external assessments (Darling-Hammond, 1993)—all examples of technical changes.

Structural reform by itself in the K–12 U.S. educational system, though common, has been often inadequate to affect school change (Cuban, 2013, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Guskey, 2002). Lack of opportunities for meaningful professional development has been one of the main barriers standing in the way of structural reform (Stewart et al., 2012) because imposing new structures on teachers without adequate support is not an effective strategy. Another obstacle to the success of structural reforms has been what is termed the “grammar of schooling”—a persistent condition that seems unchangeable (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The normal functioning of schooling typically characterized by factors such as (a) subjects are taught in isolation, (b) content area departments
are siloed, (c) teachers largely work autonomously and in isolation, (d) students are placed into grade levels based on age, (e) high school schedules delineate time boundaries in which every subject gets an equal amount of time, and (f) students are given artificial deadlines and cut-off points for their learning has seemed fixed. This condition has not evolved much in the past several decades and has often pushed against new ideas of doing school (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Many structural reforms are intended to improve teaching, but any changes in teaching practice are a blend of old didactic approaches that emphasize memorization and “knowledge” and new constructivist approaches that emphasize teaching for deep understanding and, at best, have not significantly impacted this grammar of schooling (Cuban, 2013b; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Structural reform tends to be a technical solution unlikely to address the cultural change often needed to affect change.

The success of any significant structural change rests on the shoulders of teachers, as they are called to teach under a new arrangement (Cerit, 2013; Correnti & Rowan, 2007; Rowan & Miller, 2007). Such change efforts have often been challenged by teachers’ beliefs (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016), a lack of teacher self-efficacy (Cerit, 2013), and a lack of adequate support from school leaders (Stewart et al., 2012). Therefore, structural reform alone without cultural reform does not always yield the intended results. Cultural reform must accompany structural reform, and this cultural reform must act upon the culture of learning of everyone in schools.

The main theoretical proposition underpinning this study was simply changing a schedule (i.e., merely making a technical change or restructuring a school) does not change the culture of teaching and learning in a school, and thus, does not necessarily achieve the desired outcome (Hubbard et al., 2006). According to previous research by Hargreaves (1995), reculturing is
necessary for any school change to have the intended impacts of improving teaching and learning. Through an examination of Sherford High School’s school rescheduling process, my research illuminated the intricacies of one restructuring journey. By neglecting the significance of cultural change, the events that unfolded with Sherford High School’s school rescheduling process were marked by turmoil and conflict.

**Scheduling Reform**

Over the last several decades, many schools have turned to the structural reform of changing school schedules to create more opportunities for students and improve teaching and learning. Changing a school schedule is an example of a structural change that affects everyone (Freeman, 1996) and can potentially challenge the grammar of schooling.

Schedule changes have become a very important part of structural reform for high school students because as Merenbloom and Kalina (2013) asserted, “a well-developed schedule provides opportunities for student needs to be met, whether those needs are to recover credit, to pursue a career interest, or to experience a curriculum that challenges high achievers” (p. 49). The way time is organized in schools can have a significant impact as to how much space students have in their schedules for coursework. A bad schedule can limit students’ choices. For instance, the school day can be divided into six periods—thus creating six spots for classes—or it can be divided into seven or eight, providing additional space for courses. A student enrolled in a traditional, year-long six-period schedule can only take six courses per year, but a student with an eight-period schedule can take two more, leaving them space for advancement, remediation, or simply the ability to explore more electives.

Examples of common school schedules include the traditional six-period schedule, seven-period schedule, alternating block schedule, and four-by-four (4x4) block schedule (Hanover...
The main features of different schedules are outlined in Appendix A. Indirectly, the length of a class period may also impact the instructional strategies teachers choose to use, and the quality of instruction has an important effect on student learning. When the traditional 50-minute period schedule is swapped with a variety of block schedules (e.g., the 4x4 schedule), students see teachers for a longer class period, which implies curriculum changes (Willis, 1993). Syllabi, lesson plans, and instructional strategies need to be adjusted and educators must be convinced this change best supports students (Bair & Bair, 2010; Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006).

In addition, some of the supposed benefits of changing to block scheduling discussed in the literature, which in turn, explains why school leaders have decided to make a scheduling change, include (a) reduced class sizes; (b) individualized pace; (c) completion of more courses per year; (d) more opportunities for remediation courses or making up courses students may have failed; (e) increased block of time for learning/depth versus breadth; (f) enhanced relationships between teachers and students; (g) decreased teacher stress due to having more planning time and seeing fewer students per day; (h) increased student focus; (i) improved discipline; and (j) less fragmented school time (Canady & Rettig, 1996; Freeman, 1996; Hanover Research, 2014).

The primary question that often drives educators’ decisions about adopting a schedule change is whether they really improve student outcomes. Implicit in the literature is an assumption that certain scheduling models are more beneficial than others in supporting a wide variety of student needs, prompting school leaders to see schedule changes as a means to improve instruction and student outcomes time (Canady & Rettig, 1996; Freeman, 1996; Rettig, 1996). Despite studies conducted on the effects of innovative schedules on student achievement (e.g., Bair & Bair, 2010; Childers, 2018; Comer, 2012; Jackson, 2013; Nogler, 2017; Parks,
2013), there has been no strong evidence to suggest changing a schedule improves learning (Hanover Research, 2014; Mizhquiri, 2019; Queen, 2008; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006). There are few peer-reviewed studies on the impact of innovative schedules. For a more detailed description of each study reviewed, please see Appendix B. Queen (2008), for example, claimed, “The difference block scheduling makes in terms of student outcomes remains inconclusive” (p. 3). Mizhquiri (2019) concluded, “Block scheduling is not associated with marked improvements in academic performance regardless of whether those are measured by GPA or standardized test scores” (p. 7). In a meta-analysis of almost 60 empirical studies, Zepeda and Mayers (2006) found student performance does not consistently improve just because of block scheduling implementation.

In fact, the impact of schedules on student learning or student outcomes are difficult to establish due to ex-post facto research designs that do not allow researchers to influence the phenomenon they are studying (Mizhquiri, 2019). Moreover, the metrics most studies have focused on to ascertain changes or results regarding student outcomes have usually been standardized test results, grade point average, and other quantitative measures, such as student scores in-class exams. However, given most of these studies had an ex post-facto design, it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between a change in schedule and improvement in such metrics because these studies cannot account for other variables that might have played a role in any changes (Mizhquiri, 2019). Moreover, standardized test scores are one snapshot of a specific type of learning and “when using standardized test scores, it is important to know the type of standardized tests given as well as the importance of the tests to avoid bias” (Mizhquiri, 2019, p. 8). Finally, standardized test scores miss the gamut of complexities of student learning at school (e.g., art, technical trades, music, athletics, social, teamwork skills).
Another assumption in the literature is teacher instruction will improve due to schedule changes, thereby improving student outcomes; however, for schedule reform to be successful, new teaching strategies are also needed (Hanover Research, 2014; Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015). Some researchers believe one type of schedule (i.e., block schedule) is a positive change because it does away with the lecture method (Canady & Rettig, 1996; Freeman, 1996). Because the longer class periods make it much more difficult for teachers to talk for the whole time, it encourages new ways of teaching (Willis, 1993). Yet, some researchers have pointed out that outdated teaching methods have persisted, even after schedule changes (Bair & Bair, 2010; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006). It is not clear that simply changing a schedule yields changes in instruction because “the people who run the schedule are the ones who make the changes in pedagogy and curriculum, and that takes time” (Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015, p. 17).

However, it is unclear the extent to which schools that shift to a block schedule successfully implement or even consider more effective instructional strategies, such as Socratic seminars, cooperative learning strategies, concept development and memory strategies, simulations, learning centers, integrated technology, reading and writing strategies for literacy development, and ways to modify direct instruction for deeper learning (Canady & Rettig, 1996). As Canady and Rettig (1995) reasoned:

Regardless of a school’s time schedule, what happens between individual teachers and students in classrooms is still most important, and simply altering the manner in which we schedule schools will not ensure better instruction by teachers or increased learning by students. (p. 240)
Teachers must engage in learning and make changes to their instruction for schedule scheduling reform to be successful. Examples of these changes are shown in the literature. For example, in one middle school schedule reform effort, one staff member commented:

We have implemented a new schedule, but more importantly, we have changed the way we teach. Much more hands-on activities and cooperative learning are taking place. We are constantly learning what the schedule can do for us and how we can manipulate it to enhance what we want to do in our classrooms and on our teams. (Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015, p. 20)

In other words, these teachers do not see themselves as subject to the schedule, but rather the other way around; they can do with the schedule what best serves their students’ needs and they highlight the importance of a culture of learning to successfully enact reform. This example speaks to the idea that gaining time by going from a traditional 50-minute block to a longer block does not automatically improve teaching, but rather it is the teachers who must determine how to teach well under a block schedule. Indeed, block schedules require “well-planned curriculum [and] different teaching methods” (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 3). However, it is less clear the extent to which school leaders communicate that a change in teaching practices should accompany a change in schedules, and whether leaders provide professional development to address this.

Changing a schedule will not automatically change teachers’ instruction methods, supporting the idea that structural reforms often fail (Ireland, 2019), and though structural changes may be “necessary, [they are not] sufficient to alter traditional teaching practices” (Cuban, 2019, para. 2). With some exceptions (e.g., Czerniak & Lumpe, 2017; Datnow & Hubbard, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2002), existing studies have rarely delved into teachers’
instructional strategies and beliefs; rather, they have used student scores as a proxy for what the teachers are doing in the classroom. Moreover, teachers’ and students’ voices have been largely absent from studies on the impact of new scheduling models (Zepeda & Mayers, 2006).

Schedule changes are not just technical fixes; they are very complex (Cuban, 2013b). Reform is unlikely to result in significant educational change if reliant solely on technical changes (Hubbard et al., 2023). It is difficult for teachers to change, partly because of their isolation and workload (Ireland, 2019), which are the norm in the teaching profession. As mentioned previously, some research has argued a cultural change is needed along with structural change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hubbard et al., 2023). Fullan (2001) explained educators need to go beyond the “structure of change” and develop “cultures of change,” so rather than “adopting innovations, one after another, [school systems produce] the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices—all the time, inside the organization as well as outside it” (p. 7). This kind of continual organizational learning, which was also supported by Senge (2006), can bring about a paradigm shift in the cultures of educational systems, which are typically resistant to change.

**Change Requires More Than a Technical Fix**

Many factors support and challenge structural change. As discussed previously, the success of any educational reform relies on teachers’ belief, support, and involvement in the decision-making process. Involving teachers is pivotal in successful implementation of a schedule change, and school leaders should be aware of how teachers’ trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), sense-making, and emotions (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005) can influence their influence their willingness to enact a schedule reform.
According to Hubbard et al. (2023), some of the aspects of the culture of schooling that reforms push up against include teacher autonomy and top-down decision-making processes. Previous research has shown when reforms are imposed as top-down decisions without including teachers in the decision-making process nor the design of the implementation of the reform, successful enactment of the reform is made difficult because teachers’ beliefs about the reform need to shift so practices can shift (Zhang & Liu, 2014).

To gain buy-in, it is important to inform all stakeholders, have key staff members visit schools with similar schedules, hold meetings with stakeholders to discuss, and finally, get consensus and approval (Hanover Research, 2014). This process can take time and can be extremely delicate; yet, dialogue is central to any transformation effort (Freire, 2000). All the relevant actors (i.e., students, parents, educators, school leaders and anyone else affiliated to the particular school) should be included. To accomplish approval of a new schedule, school leadership must engage all stakeholders in an open-ended, creative dialogue (i.e., the decision is not already a foregone conclusion). Such a dialogue may “challenge the traditional hierarchical school” (Bridich, 2016, p. 12) because it values the voices of those without formal power. In addition, these conversations need to be able to “[unpack the] deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations or even pictures and images that influence how [both teachers and school leaders] understand our world and take action” (Senge, 2000, p. 8 as cited in Bridich, 2016, p. 12). Most importantly, stakeholders need to understand clearly why a new schedule is necessary (Hanover Research, 2014). As the Hanover Research (2014) reports stated, all stakeholders need to understand what problem the change is intended to solve so they can be on board with it.

Another useful framework for understanding what is required to lead cultural change is Kotter et al.’s (2021) eight steps for leading change. The eight steps are: creating a sense of
urgency, building a guiding coalition, forming a strategic vision, enlisting a volunteer army, enabling action by removing barriers, generating short-term wins, sustaining acceleration and instituting change” (Kotter et al., 2021).

Providing and enhancing professional development can also be a structural change strategy that supports the cultural change needed for school reform. Though professional development is one of the main factors in the successful enactment of a schedule reform (e.g., Bair & Bair, 2010), adequate professional development is often missing (Allen, 2009). As a result, the potential benefits of a reform change are not actualized.

In the process of changing schedules, school leaders should engage in “careful consideration of how that change will lead to changes in teaching and learning” (Drake et al., 2018, as cited in Jones, 2019, p. 147). If the expectation with a schedule change is instruction should improve, a key question asks to what extent school leaders support teachers’ ability to plan new and improved curriculum and uptake different teaching methods to fully take advantage of the opportunities a new schedule provides. According to a Hanover Report (2014), teachers need “adequate teacher professional development targeting instructional strategies, [which] seems to be the determining factor in whether or not students will perform better or worse under a new scheduling model—not the scheduling model itself” (p. 7). In many cases, teachers’ ability to transform instruction is related to the support or lack of support they receive from their school leaders.

Leaders can improve their chances of gaining teachers’ support by enhancing the quality of professional development. One way this is accomplished is by integrating data into the professional development. Leaders need to “collect and link student-level achievement data to specific teachers [to improve] teacher talent, [and] target professional development
opportunities” (Jacob, 2012, p. 11). Insisting on evidence of success is one of the major strategies school leaders have to ensure structural reforms have their intended impact (Hattie, 2015). To create a culture of organizational learning (Senge, 2006) and facilitate school reform is to develop a sense of shared accountability for student results (Fiarman, 2017; Higgins et al., 2012). This shared sense of accountability counters the norm of teacher isolation. A cultural shift where all teachers and leaders feel accountable for students beyond the walls of their classrooms/offices can help to gain support for educational change.

In Guskey’s (2002) work around professional development that helps teachers change, one important element was regular feedback on whether the new practices teachers are trying result in improved student outcomes. That feedback can come from conversations around data, coaching, and support from leaders.

Leaders can also experiment with new structures for professional development, and they should shape what happens inside these structures. Stewart et al. (2012) identified the need for adequate, schoolwide professional development structures, such as professional learning communities (PLCs; DuFour, 2003) or response to intervention (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Such structures can be supportive of successful structural reform. School leaders can facilitate creation of a process and/or a structure to ensure teachers can seamlessly collect, analyze, and reflect on the learning evidence, such as integrating this cycle into the work of different types of collaborative structures or providing coaching to teachers.

The importance of creating cultures of collaboration to promote teacher learning cannot be overstated. Much research exists about what does not work in terms of professional development (e.g., one-off seminars, decontextualized learning from outside trainers, summer professional development), but the research on what does work is nascent at best. Many claims
and perspectives put forth in the 1990s in favor of collaboration (Friend & Cook, 1990; Gitlin, 1999; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997); however, convincing evidence has been provided only recently by researchers such as Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) and Datnow and Park (2018).

Examples of collaborative structures that develop teachers include PLCs (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Stewart et al., 2012) or response to intervention (Stewart et al., 2012). PLCs are one structure that have been shown to potentially have positive effects on opportunities to collaborate, getting teachers on the same page, and improving student learning (Williams et al., 2008). These structures can create conditions for organizational learning (Senge, 2006). Because teacher isolation is one of the cultural norms of the teaching profession, creation of such collaborative structures might be a supporting factor in the successful implementation of structural reform. Schools can furthermore create a culture of organizational learning (Senge, 2006) to mitigate teacher isolation and increase opportunities for professional learning, thus “go[ing] beyond new programs and structures and attend[ing] to the overall culture for capacity building” (Higgins et al., 2012, p. 90).

**Conclusion**

The literature has been clear on the role of stakeholder buy-in on the success of a reform and the need for effective professional development for teachers that can support that change. In the specific case of schedule changes—a change that affects the whole school—teacher buy-in is extremely important to its success and teachers’ ability to transform instruction. Teacher capacity relies on receiving adequate professional development. Ultimately, decisions about schedules have to be made in collaboration with all stakeholders, taking into consideration the context, the extent to which a new schedule would benefit students, and the ways in which schools should support teachers in implementing the new schedule and growing in their instructional practices.
School reform relies heavily on teacher growth. New initiatives like schedule changes hinge on teachers’ abilities to adopt new strategies in that context. Just as student learning cannot improve without improved teaching, teacher quality will not magically transform; leaders must actively support educators through professional development. In that sense, the role of school leaders, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and anyone else who significantly influences instruction in a school is to manage the change process effectively with teachers (Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015). Substantive cultural shifts are needed in schools so educators can successfully enact structural reform. All in all, the promise of innovative schedules to improve teaching and learning seems highly dependent on effective leadership during decision making and adequate professional development that supports teachers in the reform process.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and the methods I used to examine the reform effort at Sherford High School, specifically the schedule change that was put forth by district leaders. I designed my study to pay particular attention to the role all stakeholders played as the reform was adopted and implemented and to understand the factors that supported and challenged the effort. The findings of my analysis are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. The first of these findings chapters presents and describes four phases of the decision, and the second directly addresses the main research questions (i.e., why the change was made, how stakeholders responded, and the factors that influenced their responses). Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss implications and lessons learned from this schedule change for school reform initiatives, with particular attention paid to how reform decisions can be made in collaboration with all stakeholders and the types of support teachers need to buy into and implement change.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design and methods of the current study. This study was a qualitative case study of a high school in Southern California that changed its class schedule from a six-period yearlong schedule to a four-by-four (4x4) schedule. The primary research questions in this study were:

1. Why did the district decide to change the schedule?
2. How did different stakeholders respond to the decision?
3. What factors’ shaped stakeholders’ responses?

Research Design

My research design consisted of a qualitative case study of one school in Southern California in the early stages of implementation of a 4x4 schedule—between its 2nd and 3rd year of implementation. Context is very important in qualitative case studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One advantage of concentrating in-depth interviews of individual participants in one particular district context was I was able to collect data on multiple and potentially competing versions of reality (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) with individuals that shared a particular educational context. I was able to compare different participants’ reactions to the decision to change a high school schedule and to make inferences as to the factors that influenced those reactions.

This single case study design was the most suitable for my study because I was able to deeply study the phenomenon and, in so doing, generate insights other sites in similar situations or with similar contexts could possibly apply. Any research method, including the case study, can be used for exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory purposes (Yin, 2018). The case study
described in this current study was mostly exploratory and descriptive. It is exploratory because I wanted to know the factors that influenced stakeholders’ responses to structural school reforms such as schedule changes. It is descriptive because I provided an in-depth description of both the decision-making process and those factors that influenced stakeholders’ perception of it. It was also an instrumental case because its purpose was to describe an issue or multiple issues (Stake, 1995). I examined the actions school leaders take to gain support from (or cause resistance in) stakeholders for a reform. I used my case study for all those purposes to illuminate the intervention of a schedule change in one high school.

Because schedule changes in schools require complex decision making and their success depends on effective professional development, effective communication, and other factors, case study methodology was appropriate to study this complex phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I delved deeply into the case and provided a detailed description of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018) of the decision to elucidate how different stakeholders responded to the decision and tease apart the factors that influenced those reactions. Some of the factors I considered were communication around the decision, how stakeholders perceived the decision, and whether enough professional development was provided for the transition. Via all the data collected, I described the decision itself (i.e., Chapter 4), provided answers to my research questions via an analysis of themes (i.e., Chapter 5), and discussed implications for reform (i.e., Chapter 6).

To ensure the knowledge gained from a case study is accurate, Creswell and Poth (2018) highlighted the importance of studying real-life cases of issues that are in-progress. Defining the case is an essential first step in conducting case study research (Yin, 2018). I choose a public school in Southern California—Sherford High School, a pseudonym—that was in the early stages of implementing a 4x4 schedule. Though there were other sites in the region with 4x4
schedules, they implemented the schedule as long as 10 years ago. I felt it was very problematic to ask them to recall a reform adoption that was done so long ago, and it was also highly unlikely the administrators that led those changes would still be there.

Because the school I chose was in the early stages of implementation, it was not possible to fully understand the impact of the schedule on instruction; however, I did collect stakeholder’s perceptions about the decision-making process and glean insights about their reaction to the new schedule. I was able to examine the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding adoption and implementation of the reform. This case was bounded by the school context and delimited by participants (i.e., school leaders, parents, board members, community members, teachers), timeframe of data collection (i.e., approximately 6 months), and place (i.e., one school in the early stages of a transition to the 4x4 schedule).

**Setting**

This study examined one school selected based on convenience, as I worked full time at this school at the time of this study, and it transitioned to a 4x4 schedule in the 2021–2022 school year. This school was a midsize public school with just over 1,000 students. The student body was fairly racially diverse with a total minority enrollment of 36%. Economically speaking, 8% of the student body was considered economically disadvantaged. The school and district are located in an affluent, suburban area of the region in Southern California.

**Participants**

I interviewed a total of 19 participants from April 2023–September 2023. Table 1 reflects the participants and their role at the Sherford district. As the Table 1 demonstrates, I strove to interview a variety of different stakeholders to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2007). Though I obtained permission to interview students, the logistics involved in interviewing them were too
complex to make it work. I did have access to a variety of other data where student voice was present.

**Table 1**

*Types and Number of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant roles</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher with a leadership role</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District-level director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead counselor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former board member**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community member (not a parent)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * Principal 1 served during decision making (2018–2021), Principal 2 began service during schedule implementation (2021–time of study).

** Former board member was on the board during decision-making process.*

After obtaining permission from the superintendent and Principal Two to conduct research, Principal 2 and I brainstormed ways to recruit participants. I was able to send out an all-staff email asking for participation from the teachers. In addition, I recruited three teacher members in my own teaching department to be able to have more teacher perspectives included. Principal 2 also provided a list of parents with varying perspectives of the schedule and encouraged me to contact them directly. Thus, I observed an event related to providing feedback on the schedule and recruited two participants from that event—a community member and one of the parents.
Regarding the school administrators and district-level administrators (e.g., principals, superintendent, lead counselor), I recruited them via direct contact, either by email or in person. The board member I interviewed was referred to me by the superintendent. One of the parents also gave me recommendations about additional parents I should contact, and some of these contacts also became participants.

**Data Collection and Methods**

Collecting and integrating different sources of data is essential in qualitative case studies to provide an in-depth understanding of the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data were collected from a variety of sources, including interviews, document analysis, and one observation. This process provided an in-depth understanding of the process of schedule change at the high school.

In this case study, I conducted a variety of interviews with different employees and parents associated with the school and examined a variety of important school documents to get a sense of the selected school’s context and their instructional objectives and the decision-making process. For example, I listened to several years’ worth of board meetings and read documents such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Report (WASC Report) and the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). I also conducted one observation of a public community event held in Spring 2023 to evaluate how the schedule was going.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out, “Contextual material [is essential] to describe the setting for the case and draw upon multiple sources of information about the case to provide an in-depth picture of it” (p. 123). My data collection matrix in Table 2 (Creswell & Poth, 2018) outlines the type of information I collected.
Table 2

Types of Data Collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>● 19 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School artifacts</td>
<td>● WASC Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● SPESA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● School board meetings 2016–2023 and related documents found in the agendas, such as data reports, reports on the 4x4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Professional development documents provided by the Department of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Surveys and reports related to the schedule provided by current principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Two binders of information documenting the decision provided by former principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>● Observation of public community meeting on the 4x4 360 evaluation process by board subcommittee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Availability of these artifacts and the interviews with both school leaders and teachers enabled me to triangulate the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Stake, 1995), or check for the same themes in multiple places. My interviews dug deep to provide a thick description and ensure credibility and internal validity. I conducted the interviews following a semistructured protocol. I made sure to make interviews conversational and tried to gain a sense of the major topics, such as why participants thought the decision was made, how the decision-making process unfolded, and challenges faced when implementing or transitioning to the new schedule. I also made sure to ask participants about professional development, given the literature pointed to this concept as one of the important aspects of school reform. See Appendix C for a list of questions used for the semistructured interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected the data in person for both the observation and most interviews, but one of the interviews had to be done over Zoom. I recorded all interviews on my phone and the Zoom interview on Zoom, then transcribed all interviews using a safe software called MacWhisper. I
started each interview by thanking each participant and explaining the consent form. After participants signed the consent form, I engaged them in conversation about the main questions of the study, such as their perception of the why behind the decision, how the decision-making process unfolded, and its impact on them. At the end of the interview, a few participants commented they felt really listened to and were surprised by how little I spoke during the interview.

Regarding document analysis, I read the school’s SPSA and WASC reports to get a sense of the school’s goals and areas of growth. I also watched key parts in board meetings from 2016–2023 and identified board meetings that would be most relevant to describing the decision-making process. I downloaded several clips and used the MacWhisper app to transcribe board meetings in search of additional stakeholders’ voices. Regarding board meetings analysis, I first did a search for the term “bell schedule” on the agendas; wherever it showed up, I downloaded key parts of those board meetings addressing the bell schedule decision transition. This search yielded seven key board meetings between 2020–2023. Then, knowing this process started sometime in 2018, I worked my way chronologically from 2018–2020, listening to the superintendent and board comments from each meeting. When the mention of a new schedule or schedule transition started to happen, I also listened to comments from the public in those meetings. I continued this procedure for the board meetings from January through November 2018, also saving several important clips I would later transcribe. Afterward, I shifted my method slightly because I found the first mention of a bell schedule study committee in the November 2018 meeting. Starting at the end of that meeting, I then watched similar clips in subsequent board meetings (e.g., superintendent comments, board comments, any relevant reports from the districts or the school) in high-speed and clicking to advance the videos faster.
until I noticed or saw—there were often visuals accompanying district updates—any updates on bell schedule committee or the decision.

By watching the videos at high speed and clicking forward little by little, I was able to reduce the time it took by half and sometimes a quarter of the length of the original video. I listened to and took notes when I found relevant clips and made a note to transcribe relevant parts that included worthwhile quotes. I did this to save time and work more efficiently while still finding any information related to the bell schedule shift. I also was able to download and read department updates included in the board meeting agendas, which also enabled me to skip some of the video clips altogether. Finally, I went back and watched the superintendent and board member comments from 2016–2018 to ensure I had not missed major events related to schedule transition, and I did not find much relevant content.

Finally, the board meeting agendas were full of reports and documents that proved very useful in understanding the evolution of the decision. For example, there were a variety of updates to the board including data on how students were doing and updates on the bell schedule transition. The learning department at the district also provided information on professional development. Both principals also provided survey results and documents related to the 4x4 implementation.

**Data Analysis**

For my data analysis procedures, I created a separate Word document for the three research questions and other aspects of reform I was interested in learning about: (a) why the decision was made, (b) how the decision was made, (c) professional development available to teachers, and (d) impact on stakeholders and stakeholders’ responses to it. I then started analyzing my interviews manually. As I read each interview transcript, I selected key quotes
related to each of the research questions, and using a three-column grid, I pasted each quote into the left-hand column. In the right-hand column, I made a brief comment analysis of each quote containing my initial ideas about important themes.

This process involved what Saldaña (2016) referred to as theming the data. Theming is different than coding because themes are the outcomes of coding, or statements that explain what the unit of data is about or what it means. When theming, the researcher thinks about a chunk of the data and composes a full-sentence statement that expresses the deeper meanings of the data; these sentences became my draft themes and almost a jump start into my analysis of findings.

After I separately themed all the interviews for each research question, I reread these themes and analysis in the right-hand column to unveil patterns. The patterns I saw turned into a final list of themes that I then reduced and collapsed until I felt I had captured the most important themes in the data that encompassed the knowledge I gained from stakeholders. I then used the middle column to match each quote to at least one of the final list of themes to better organize my analysis prior to writing the findings section. I repeated this procedure for each research question to arrive at the main themes in my findings. Table 3 includes a small sample of one of my theming analysis charts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview quote</th>
<th>Final theme</th>
<th>Theme/analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02a – Principal 1</td>
<td>And as I dug a little deeper, we’re looking at how and why people, students, got off track. So for example, if you got a D in the second term of IM2, and maybe it was a life situation and not necessarily your skill [that caused you to get a D]. Maybe a major trauma happened in the family and just your ability to balance school work–life balance was low. Like life happens and so for something to occur in a high schoolers life and for it to impact their where they can go after high school is not necessarily a supportive structure. So essentially the second reason remediation.</td>
<td>The schedule was changed for academic reasons.</td>
<td>The schedule was changed to provide remediation opportunities for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02a – Principal 1</td>
<td>Third reason our CTE the state of California a year or 2 before we started looking at bell schedules started measuring CTE completion. The state of California measures CTE completion by taking two CTE classes in the same subject area and it ending with what is called a concentrator course. So essentially taking an immediate intro/immediate level course and then an advanced course. So an easy one to describe would be woodworking and advanced woodworking. That makes you a CTE completer. The state measures that and puts it on the dashboard of the high school.</td>
<td>The schedule was changed to improve students’ career readiness.</td>
<td>The schedule was changed to increase opportunities for students to take CTE courses, complete CTE pathways and to provide opportunities for students to become more well-rounded in multiple areas of interest and benefit their future careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Interview quote</td>
<td>Final theme</td>
<td>Theme/analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even though—so as a small high school, we have more CTE courses than a typical high school of our size. But yet our completion rate was quite low. If you didn’t look at [Art School] kids. Almost all [Art School] kids as long as they stayed in they completed two pathways. But if you looked even [Art School] kids that didn’t stay in all 4 years if they didn’t make it to their senior they weren’t they didn’t they didn’t get counted as the completer. But with all the requirements UC A through G with kids possibly having to do remediation We had evidence that they likely had an interest in that career technical ed content area, but when I looked at their schedules, their 4-year plan, there was no room to take advanced woodworking or to take advanced sports medicine or to take advanced AP computer science. So in general, what is good for kids in the world we’re living in, which means having you really need to leave high school and the next couple chapters of your life being very well rounded because the careers that they’re going to do don’t exist yet. And they’re going to have to have that broad set of skills where they can kind of flex their strengths with the careers available and a traditional finish English, finish math, finish science no longer really fit with that.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Interview quote</td>
<td>Final theme</td>
<td>Theme/analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02a – Principal 1</td>
<td>Our six period school day was no longer meeting the state requirements for the number of minutes we had to have per day. When they adopted it, so here’s another reason. When they adopted the six-period schedule the way it was, they added an E period or a zero period. And when they did that, the state allowed a school district to count that as the regular school day, meaning the number of minimum minutes required. That had changed and we had not changed. Because we hadn’t been audited essentially, or it hadn’t been questioned by the state, we were out of compliance and it needed to be changed. So no matter what happened when we first started the conversation about bell’s schedule, the first thing was the school day will get longer. It will be almost an hour longer, and that will impact all of us as employees here at Sherford High School. So the timing of adjusting a new bell schedule to Sherford High School having to meet the new structure of how the state counted minimum number of minutes, that was actually good timing in a sense. Had to make a change anyways. Why not provide kids with more opportunities.</td>
<td>The schedule was changed to address compliance with minutes issues.</td>
<td>The schedule had to change because they were out of compliance with the required number of instructional minutes by the state.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once I had partially written up my findings based on the rich data yielded from participant interviews, I returned to the board meeting transcripts to identify quotes related to my themes and to see if any new themes emerged. Context from the board meetings was especially helpful in shedding light as to how the decision was made and in providing more insight into stakeholders’ responses to the decision. Finally, I continued to immerse myself in all the documents provided by the school, in particular reports and files from board meetings, survey results, and two binders’ worth of information on the transition to the schedule. Because I wanted to provide a deep description of the phenomenon, this process—which I felt was thorough—allowed me to make connections between what different participants were saying and what the documents could confirm, thus triangulating the data (Creswell, 2007).

**Positionality Statement**

An important consideration in relationship management was my positionality because the school chosen was my current workplace. There were both challenges and assets implied in my positionality as an insider in this school. One challenge was I held a teacher leadership role, which might have influenced participants’ responses slightly compared to if I were a teacher without a leadership position, as they might assign more authority to me than I would really merit. Another challenge was I was specifically in charge of supporting world language teachers and leading professional development for this department, so although I tried to avoid interviewing world language teachers, I eventually interviewed three teachers from my department to ensure I had enough teacher perspectives. However, because of my experience as an instructional leader and a person who delivers professional development, the background knowledge I gathered helped me during data collection and analysis.
My position as an employee of the school could also have been considered a great asset to the research as I had first-hand knowledge and experience about the culture of the school and the professional development that had been offered. Although doing research in one’s own work setting brings a unique set of risks to the integrity of the research, there are also many benefits, such a familiarity with the context and a stronger potential for building trusting relationships between the researchers and the interviewees, thus likely resulting in more accurate interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviewees may reveal more to insiders and to outside researchers who are associated with the insider via their collaboration, and these richer data may lead to more robust conclusions. One challenge was to maintain a beginner’s mind when I conducted the interviews and not jump too quickly to forming conclusions. Overall, the deep knowledge I had of the school context enabled me to provide rich descriptions and prepared me in knowing how to ask questions during interviews. Hence, I feel the benefits outweighed the challenges.

On a personal note, in 2021, while on my maternity leave, I received a phone call and follow-up text messages from one of the leaders of the teachers’ “Revolt Movement” against the 4x4 schedule. This teacher, who was a teacher in my department, asked me to add my signature to the letter composed by my department and asked me to reach out to another teacher to whom I was close in the department so she could sign it too. I did not agree to sign it, stating via text message my belief that the benefits of the 4x4 schedule would outweigh the risks. I was very aware of my bias in favor of the reform, so it was top of mind whenever conducting interviews to ensure to listen to and respond to the participant based on their own ideas and not try to impose mine. While searching through board meetings and analyzing interviews, I made it a priority to find contrasting perspectives and to problematize, to ensure my bias was not leading me astray.
Limitations

One major limitation of the study was I investigated only one site in this study. However, I feel confident that given the large amount of data I collected and my ability to dig deep into the documents pertaining to this case allowed me to provide rich descriptions and thoughtful analysis of the reform process. As a result, my analysis may be helpful, and transferable, to other similar contexts. Another limitation was student voice was largely missing from this study because the study focused mainly on administrators’, parents’, and teachers’ perspectives.

Conclusions

This study sought to understand how best to implement a schedule change as a strategy for school reform, with a specific focus on the decision-making process, how stakeholders responded to it, and the factors that influenced their responses. A deep study of one site revealed how the decision-making process unfolded and provided some insights about why the decision was made and how various stakeholders responded to it. School leaders who are considering a schedule change may benefit from the results of this study as they plan for reform.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE FOUR PHASES OF DECISION MAKING

The purpose of this study was to contribute understanding about how school leaders implement change and gain support from stakeholders. In this particular case, high school leaders engaged in a decision-making process to implement a new school schedule. I examined why they chose this schedule and how they communicated with stakeholders during the decision-making process. I analyzed the actions taken by district and school leaders and whether these actions created trust or mistrust; support or resistance; and acceptance, adoption, or challenge for the reform. This knowledge can be particularly helpful to school districts who are in the midst of school change, specifically change that is likely to become unpopular or contentious among stakeholders. The main research questions this study addressed were:

1. What factors motivated school leaders’ decision for the school schedule reform?
2. How did stakeholders respond to the decision?
3. What factors influenced stakeholders’ perception of the reform?

This was a qualitative case study of Sherford (pseudonym) High School, a school in Southern California that at the time of the study was in the middle stages (i.e., in between the 2nd and 3rd year) of implementing a new four-by-four (4x4) school schedule that suggested considerable reform in instruction. To recapitulate, in a six-period, year-long bell schedule, students take six classes per year, for a total of 24 classes over their high school career, whereas in a 4x4 schedule, students take up to four classes in the fall term (from August to January) and then up to four new classes in the spring term (from February to June) for a total of up to 32 classes. As a teacher at this school, I knew the decision-making process for this reform had occurred for several years and was described by many as “flawed” and “contentious.”
I chose to use a case study methodology because as Creswell and Roth (2018) made clear, case study design is ideal for studying decision-making processes because they are complex and often extend over time. This is especially true when it comes to implementing a school reform that impacts all stakeholders, is contentious, and involves challenges over a long period of time. The method used in this case study was semistructured interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators.

I also analyzed a variety of related documents, including school board meeting recordings; stakeholder opinion surveys, which included student input; district and administrative artifacts, including a variety of reports to the school board, local newspaper articles, and opinions; and other stakeholders’ responses to the new schedule. Because I entered this investigation between Years 2 and 3 of the schedule implementation, these documents were particularly helpful in capturing the events related to adoption of the reform. Because teachers are arguably most directly affected by school schedules because they have to rearrange their lesson plans, scope, and sequences to accommodate a different time period and course length, I was particularly interested in learning about their perspective and involvement in the reform and the effect the reform had on their teaching.

In the next 2 chapters, I present a timeline of the decision-making process that led to a change from a six-period year-long school schedule to a 4x4 schedule, address why and how the decision was made, and analyze stakeholders’ responses to the decision and the factors that shaped their responses. In Chapter 4, I describe the four general phases of the events that happened during the decision, providing a detailed timeline and description of how the decision-making process played out at each phase. In Chapter 5, I present the most important themes that emerged regarding why the decision was made to implement this reform, the stakeholders’
responses to it, and the factors that shaped those responses. In Chapter 6 (i.e., the discussion), I discuss implications for school reform efforts more generally.

**Four Phases in the Decision**

The decision to change to a 4x4 schedule at Sherford High School was an extremely long, complex, and contentious process. Understanding the when, what, and who was involved in what happened was quite possibly the most time-consuming aspect of my research. However, bringing together recordings of school board meetings, interviews with different actors, and district and community artifacts (e.g., reports, newspaper articles), I was able to gain appreciation for how complex this decision was.

I analyzed all the data and categorized the timeline of events into four phases: (a) problem-framing phase, (b) stakeholder input phase, (c) preparation and revolt phase, and (d) implementation and evaluation phase. Each of the phases is summarized in Figure 1.
Phase 1 included a visioning process in which the superintendent, at the school board’s request, created a strategic long-range plan. He verbalized the district’s intention to perform in the top 10%, both academically and in college and career readiness, of all schools in the county. The long-range plan called for evaluating existing programs and structures for effectiveness and using data to improve quality of programs and structures. During this phase, one of the structures the superintendent and his team district-level leaders were looking at were bell schedules on the different campuses. In fact, elementary and middle school principals had already led their staff through bell schedule reforms in these first 2 years; but, the six-period, year-long high school
bell schedule remained, in the eyes of the board and the superintendent, as a very limiting structure.

The superintendent and his team conducted research on different schedule models, including reading articles about alternative schedules and traveling to different states and schools to conduct site visits. Moreover, prior to being hired, the superintendent had been a principal in a school with a 4x4 schedule, so he had first-hand experience of the opportunities a different schedule could afford. Near the end of Phase 1, the newly appointed high school principal and the superintendent met to talk about launching the schedule reform process with the hopes of making a significant structural change.

During Phase 2, district leaders, Principal 1, the vice principal, and a team of teachers gathered and analyzed data to further understand the “problem” that a schedule reform was meant to address. On the district end, the superintendent launched a virtual ThoughtExchange (2024), in which he primarily gathered information about parents’ desires for their children’s education. Meanwhile, Principal 1 and the vice principal gathered data on students’ A–G eligibility at graduation, number of students who had Ds and Fs, and other academic data such as advanced placement passing rates. They shared these data with the teachers who came together in the bell schedule study committee. These teachers analyzed the data, made requests about additional data they wanted, and studied alternative bell schedules.

At some point in this process, the teachers in the committee requested to dissolve the committee and bring the decision to the whole staff. In the Fall 2019, as a whole staff, they supported adopting a seven-period, year-long schedule as the new structure, and they were opposed to a 4x4 schedule. By Spring 2020, as the COVID-19 global pandemic reared its head, the school board unanimously voted to adopt the 4x4 schedule, much to the teachers’ surprise.
Phase 3 started with a strategic revolt against the decision, which was spearheaded by three teachers and garnered the support of most faculty at the high school. A small group of vocal parents were also against the decision. The teachers sought out to be heard by the board members and the superintendent in private meeting. In the Spring of 2021, two particularly long and tense board meetings focused on the question of whether to rescind the decision. Ultimately, the board upheld the decision and implementation began in the fall of 2021.

Phase 4 was the implementation phase, which was still ongoing during the course of this study. During this phase, students and parents began to experience the schedule, and teachers began to adjust to it. A call to study the impact of the schedule came from the community, and a board member proposed the creation of a citizen’s committee to evaluate the schedule. The board voted to create a board subcommittee of citizens to evaluate the 4x4 schedule. Results of their study showed although there was still a significant percentage of stakeholders who pointed out negative aspects of the schedule, the benefits most parents and students have seen have outweighed the risks for making another major change to the schedule. All in all, most teachers started to accept and adapt to the new schedule, even if hard feelings lingered about how the decision was made.

I now provide a more detailed analysis of the events in each phase. For a description of specific events and documentation in the form of quotes and notes about each event, please see Appendix D.

**Phase 1: Problem Framing (2016–2018)**

I delineated the beginning of the first phase—or problem-framing phase—in 2016, when the current superintendent was hired. In his first 2 years as superintendent, he worked on formulating a strategic, long-range plan, in which he identified district priorities and goals for the
next several years. The main goal of that long range plan was for the district’s students to perform in the top 10% in the county, according to a May 2020 board report. The plan called for the learning department and site administration to “identify top research-based instructional practices, models, programs, and resources, and make a recommendation to the board,” as stated in the superintendent’s long-range plan. Upon analyzing student outcome data (e.g., the percentage of students graduating college ready) and current structural challenges, district leaders found the high school’s bell schedule, which provided space for six classes every year, was limiting to students.

During those first 2 years of the superintendent’s tenure, schedule change initiatives were led at both elementary schools and at the middle school to strengthen “pathways in arts, music, science, and engineering,” according to a comment made by a former board member during the May 2021 board meeting. Creating similar opportunities at the high school was the next step of the puzzle for the Sherford school district. A former board member spoke passionately about this during the May 2021 board meeting when they said:

Sherford wants greatness, not mediocrity. . . . In the framework of the strategic plan, in a relatively short time, since my kids were here, pathways in arts, music, science, and engineering have been built up at our elementary schools and middle school, all made possible with recent bell schedule changes at CMS, Village, and Strand that resulted in more robust student experiences. By the way, huge kudos to the elementary and middle school teachers for handling those changes with professionalism and minimal disruption. So you see the district has already allocated resources of money and time to a coordinated and approved strategic plan. The 4x4 discussion should be framed in the context of this umbrella vision for SUSD, which brings us to where we find ourselves today.
Bringing a schedule change to the high school was thus viewed in alignment to this long-range plan and as the next logical step for the high school. The search for alternative schedules was initially conducted by the superintendent, the learning department, and board members. One board member reported the superintendent and a different board member traveled as far as Philadelphia exploring what other schedule models might look like. One of the schedule options the superintendent was aware of and had researched was the 4x4 schedule, in which, rather than taking six courses per year, students could take up to eight courses—four courses each semester, similar to what many colleges offer. The hope was to create more space for opportunities.

Of course, a superintendent cannot simply dictate for a school to change its schedule. Principals are in charge of determining a schedule at their site and they often do it with staff input. In August 2018, the Sherford High School assistant principal was promoted to principal, which kicked off the decision-making process. In the same November 2018 meeting in which the board approved the superintendent’s long-range plan, Principal 1 gave an update to the board. In his update, he mentioned a bell schedule review committee and said the committee was set to meet for the first time in December 2008 and included representatives from almost every department. The committee would be a year and a half venture where they would examine data and study schedules to come up with a new schedule.

When it comes to successful school reform, understanding and framing the problem is very important. Reform efforts often attempt to make a positive change, but stakeholders are not always aware of or in agreement with the specific problem a reform initiative is meant to solve (Brown & Arriaza, 1999). Making sure stakeholders contribute to the problem-framing phase and are moved by a sense of urgency to solve the problem is an essential key to successful reform. In the case of Sherford Unified School District’s decision to move to a 4x4 schedule in
its high school, inclusion of all stakeholders did not occur. Instead, the problem-framing stage was mainly conducted by district and school administration. The district was already convinced the problem lied in the schedule, an idea that would not necessarily later be shared by teachers. If those on the ground do not agree with what the problem is, it becomes very thorny to then try to impose “solutions.”

In the next stage, stakeholder input was gathered, including parents and teachers. Though teachers were invited to provide input via their participation in a committee to study bell schedules, there was little evidence of the dialogic involvement of teachers in shaping what would eventually become the final schedule—the 4x4 schedule. The lack of teachers’ ability to effect change helps to account for the events that unfolded, which is described later in Phase 3—the Revolt.

**Phase 2: Stakeholder Input (2018–2020)**

This second phase that culminated in the initial decision to adopt the 4x4 included a variety of opportunities for input from different stakeholders. For example, the ThoughtExchange that was conducted virtually with parents in 2019 provided data on student needs and rationale for the urgency to expand opportunities.

Staff input was also sought. When the new principal of Sherford High School began his tenure in the Summer of 2018, one of his main charges was to lead the staff through a schedule change. Principal 1 was directed by the superintendent and the board to create a schedule that significantly expanded opportunities for students, including opportunities to remediate, accelerate, and expand their career readiness. Thus, Principal 1 established a bell schedule study committee, which met for the first time in December 2018. He recruited volunteer teacher representatives from all major academic departments, including two from the electives
department, one from the English department, one from the special education department, two from the math department, one from the world languages department, one from the social studies department, and one from the science department. This first committee meeting was guided by specific beliefs, considerations, questions, data about current status, possible action steps, and possible timeline for implementation of a new schedule. These aspects were provided in bullet point form to the staff on a document.

During the first meeting of the committee, the staff discussed and provided feedback on these bullet points, based on the notes from Principal 1 on the handout. At this first meeting, Principal 1 set up a process that seemed dialogic and creative in nature because the documents provided to the committee had language such as “if we decide to implement,” and “if we decide to change.” To teacher participants of this committee, these messages may have been logically interpreted as though the decision was truly in their hands and a schedule change was not necessarily a foregone conclusion.

The members of the committee asked questions and looked at data regarding the rationale for a need to change schedules, including A–G data, and learned about different schedule models throughout the nation. However, during that same school year, the decision-making process shifted from this small committee to the whole staff. As Principal 1 reported, and other staff members interviewed corroborated, “Early on in that committee’s life, the committee made the request that all staff be involved in the process.” So ultimately, the committee voted to dissolve the committee. The committee did this probably recognizing that the potential future change would have such an impact that it was important for all staff to be involved in the decision making.
In addition to bringing the whole staff into the discussion, the union leaders (i.e., teachers who act as leaders and liaisons to the teachers’ union) took an active role in shaping the direction of the reform. Principal 1 and union cochairs started meeting weekly so the union could give advice on each of the next steps in the process. The meetings with the union guided much of the process after that. In our interview, Principal 1 provided an example of how the union leaders guided the “how” of the process by stating:

The union wanted to run an all-teacher meeting, a certificated staff meeting, about the Bell schedule change without administrators running that meeting. But they wanted administrators to observe. So, the two assistant principals and myself sat in the back of the room and I upfront at the beginning of that staff meeting stated, “Unless you directly ask me a question and state that you need the answer now, I will not speak during this meeting. I’m an observer.”

The union helped shape who got to give input. In addition, other avenues for input included a series of lunch meetings hosted by Principal 1 and teachers were able to sign up for individual appointments with Principal 1 through an online calendar. Further opportunities to provide input included dedicating time in Wednesday all-staff meetings to discuss the schedule change and soliciting department feedback during department meetings. Principal 1 described this phase in the process as dynamic and collaborative by stating:

My favorite part of the whole process, and it happened so many times, there were a handful of staff that very much their mind would spin during prep or during lunch or while they were driving and they would have an idea and then come running to my office like knocking down the door, ‘here’s an idea’ [and] those ideas actually impacted how our next meeting occurred . . . so it was a very dynamic process.
The bell schedule study committee also compiled sample schedules from the top schools in the nation and started to imagine what a different schedule might look like. In the May 2019 update to the board\(^1\) regarding the bell schedule study committee, Principal 1 explained the actions of the committee so far, listing three meetings (one in December 2018, one in March 2019, and one in May 2019) and the all-staff survey delivered in late January 2019 to determine staff perceptions of the current schedule’s strengths and challenges and what they would like to see in a different or new schedule model. Top themes from that initial staff survey can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*January 2019 Staff Survey Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths of current bell schedule</th>
<th>Challenges of current bell schedule</th>
<th>Things you would like to see in a new schedule</th>
<th>Preference between year-long versus semester-long courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Established schedule and has worked well for over a decade</td>
<td>• Timing of final exams is problematic</td>
<td>• Ending the semester before winter break</td>
<td>• 10 classroom teachers of 47 expressed interest in exploring semester-long block classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Everyone’s used to it</td>
<td>• Semesters are not balanced, one is longer than the other</td>
<td>• Longer class periods/ more block days</td>
<td>• Seven nonclassroom support teachers (e.g., counselors, special ed team) expressed interest in exploring semester-long block classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers have already planned their scope and sequence around it</td>
<td>• Total student load at one time (would be more manageable with a different schedule such as a 4x4)</td>
<td>• Smaller class sizes or smaller student loads</td>
<td>• The rest, 37, of the staff favored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hybrid of traditional with a couple of blocks, provides variety and balance</td>
<td>• Schedule is too inconsistent (e.g., different start times and lengths of periods)</td>
<td>• Stable schedule throughout the week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Year-long, can</td>
<td>• Only six choices per year (limiting)</td>
<td>• More prep time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not enough block days, more block days could alleviate student stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Block days are hard for lower</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Principal had not been listed on the agenda nor information about the high school bell schedule committee update; instead, he presented right after the middle school principal’s update on her bell schedule change process, which was the one included in the agenda.
Based on the results and frequency of the responses listed in Table 4, it seemed a great deal of the staff liked the current six-period schedule, citing reasons such as “[they] are used to it” and “it’s the best of both worlds,” given this schedule included block days twice a week and traditional, 50-minute periods three times a week. Most of the staff was not interested in considering semester-long courses like those delivered in the 4x4 schedule. Only a few staff members agreed that the six-period schedule was limiting.

Essentially, the initial period of investigation was one of learning and collecting data, but no decisions or proposals were developed as of May 2019. The school board urged Principal 1 to move to the proposal stage with the committee and his staff and to take groups of staff members to visit other local schools with different schedules. The board communicated a sense of urgency for a decision.

In June 2019, the staff received a survey to reflect on a week-long block schedule experiment the high school had tried for spring testing. Based on the opinions shared on that survey, there was a notable lack of support for block scheduling and a lack of support for a schedule change as a whole (see Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>go slowly level students</th>
<th>keep it the same, no change needed</th>
<th>keeping the year-long schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility</td>
<td>• Some teachers want all traditional bell schedule, some want more of block.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

**June 2019 Staff Survey Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lack of Support           | ● “It was difficult for students to stay focused”  
| of Block Scheduling       | ● “Too long for physical education”  
|                           | ● “Honestly horrible. Student engagement did not last the entire time”  
|                           | ● “The lower-level students don’t have the attention span that AP students have” |
|                           | **Lack of Support**  
|                           | for a Schedule Change  
|                           | ● “Keep our current schedule. This is definitely being forced down our throats from the superintendent. The double block will also cost money . . . I thought we didn’t have any?”  
|                           | ● “Personally, I don’t really care whether or not we change our bell schedule, go to 4x4 blocks or whatever, I can make it work no matter what. But if the majority of the staff is opposed to something and/or sufficient research hasn’t been done to ensure that any change would be a bet positive one PLEASE don’t rush into major structural changes just because the board or the superintendent feels as though “there’s a sense of urgency about this.”  
|                           | ● “No. Just keep supporting teachers who are very tired working long hours so they have more energy to be effective in the classroom. Support teachers with smaller classes, fewer high-needs students in one place at one time, and the school schedule THEY choose that has worked well for a long time and doesn’t need to be fixed.” |

In this survey, the pulse of teacher attitudes started to become mistrustful of the change as teachers started to feel this schedule change was being done to them. One teacher stated, “This is definitely being forced down our throats from the superintendent.” They also proposed different solutions than a schedule change, such as smaller class sizes. They did not believe there was anything wrong with the current schedule, which “had worked well for a long time and didn’t need to be fixed.”
In October 2019, the superintendent reported on the results of the parent/student/community ThoughtExchange, which called for more opportunities and flexibility for students. There was also evidence of other opportunities for parent and community involvement in the decision-making process as detailed by Principal 1 and reported by parents, including Parent 4 in this study. In that same month, Principal 1 convened both the bell schedule study committee and the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) committees to meet. During this meeting, Principal 1 provided an initial update that he supported a seven-period schedule including an advisory period in which teachers would still teach five periods. During this meeting, staff members discussed different schedule models and designated one staff member from the science department who volunteered to compile and graphically represent different potential schedule models. Teachers were also directed to come up with questions and lists of strengths and weaknesses of the different models.

In November 2019, Principal 1 engaged parents and students to provide feedback and ask questions about different schedule models, especially the seven-period option. In this survey, two parents did not support a seven-period schedule, thinking it was too stressful and it should be a choice. Two parents wondered if the eight-period option would be better for college. To reach students, Principal 1 visited different classrooms and collected feedback from students, but there was no documentation about the content of that feedback. A teacher also reported to the board that her students were largely against the seven-period option, according to notes from the March 2020 board meeting.

In the November 2019 update to the board about the bell schedule study committee’s progress, Principal 1 stated the committee had determined during the previous spring that a semester schedule was not a good fit for the community, so although they had not yet developed
a proposal for what they wanted, the staff knew what they did not want—a 4x4 schedule. In that same November meeting, when Principal 1 presented a seven-period, year-long schedule to the board on behalf of his teachers, the board started asking why high school faculty were not considering the 4x4 schedule. The board’s foregone conclusion seemed to be the best solution was the 4x4 schedule and the staff needed to just come around to that fact. The board asked Principal 1 to “keep this thing moving down the road,” and bring back a new schedule proposal soon with more opportunities for students. The board member urged Principal 1 to display strong leadership and keep the process moving. During the November 2019 board meeting, a board member stated:

I am not gonna sit up here and try to dictate six bell or seven bell or 4x4 or anything, I think you have plenty of expertise on your campus . . . However, I’m looking at the long-range plan which we came up [with] in February/March 2018, and we had some long range objectives . . . we’ve already missed some of those deadlines, so keep this train moving down the road.

During that same meeting, the board member communicated a sense of urgency about making a decision about which schedule to adopt and reminded Principal 1 about the rationale, stating:

We want to provide opportunities for students, and the best way to do that is to reorganize the way we run the schedule with the high school . . . We need to get down the road to providing our students with more opportunities, to take more courses if that’s what they want, and that’s what the ThoughtExchanges and things are telling us, so I will just ask you, as the leader of that organization, to keep this thing moving down the road.

The board reminded Principal 1 of the reasons for the change and what stakeholders were asking for while reiterating the need to keep the process moving toward a definitive decision.
In December 2019, during an all-staff meeting, Principal 1 presented a variety of schedule options to the whole staff. Among the options presented, there was a seven-period, year-long bell schedule and a 4x4 schedule. At this meeting, it was clear the staff largely opposed the 4x4 schedule, according to Principal 1 and several teachers. Staff did not agree a 4x4 semester block schedule, which accomplished classes in 1 semester only (versus a whole year), was a good fit for Sherford High School due to emphasis placed on development of teacher–student relationships and their fear teaching and learning quality would suffer under a compressed timeline in which they would have to deliver content standards with significantly less instructional time. Seeing the teachers’ strong opposition to the 4x4 option, Principal 1 physically took that poster down and threw it to the ground, essentially promising “no 4x4,” a promise he was ultimately unable to deliver on when the 4x4 was passed by the board in May 2020. Principal 1 claimed he was never directly given a directive to ensure his staff concluded a 4x4 schedule was the desired solution in those early stages of the process. Principal 1 said he was expecting for this committee to have decision-making power.

During that same all-staff meeting, one of the participants stated another teacher asked for clarification about how many sections they would need to teach should they adopt a seven-period bell schedule. They wanted to know if they would have to teach six sections or continue to teach five. Principal 1 assured them they would continue to teach five sections only. That information made the staff more amenable to a seven-period, year-long bell schedule. Sometime in the months that followed, the staff agreed on a seven-period, year-long schedule. Following teacher input, Principal 1 said he recommended to the district that the school adopt a seven-period year-long schedule with some semester-long courses such as math support, study hall, and with a new advisory period, which the school did not have prior. Meeting notes from that
December faculty meeting and results of a teacher poll revealed tensions around the schedule change decision (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Faculty Attitudes During December 2019 Faculty Meeting*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three teachers have questions about what the intent behind the change truly is. Why are we doing this?</td>
<td>Teachers question the motives behind the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not see what it is we are doing wrong: “Do we want to be like everyone else or do we want to be better?”</td>
<td>Don’t agree with the why/seeking alternate solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers prefers to lower class sizes rather than adding more teachers. Why is there money available for a change in schedule but not for fixing what is not working in the constraints of the current schedule?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most teachers believe that the most common reason students fail is lack of motivation, lack of skill or lack of work completion, and don’t believe a change in schedule will change anything.</td>
<td>Lack of support and concern for the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some teachers still don’t understand the why for a change. One teacher questions: “Who’s for this? At what point are we going to stop debating this and ask? Feels like the only department in favor of this is the front office.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about teacher and student stress and overwhelm for a change. Key words include “mental fatigue,” “stress,” “overwhelm.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about being able to get through the curriculum with less time. Questions about the financial, logistical and personal impact of the schedule.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52% of the teachers polled support maintaining the status quo (six period schedule), 30% see a benefit to switching to a seven-period schedule but want more input as to the decision, and 17% need more information before making a decision.</td>
<td>Expectations about teachers’ role in the decision-making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers want to know if department input is going to be honored and respected.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most teachers are not satisfied with the process of participation related to the bell schedule up to this point. Teachers also suggest more ways to expand the process, such as having the board observe faculty meetings with faculty</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As seen in the data in Table 6, teacher beliefs about district administration’s motivation and a lack of agreement with and understanding of why the change was being made caused resistance to a change. Moreover, teachers expected their input would be listened to and were starting to feel unheard by district administration. There was also a fair amount of resistance to change due to concerns about the impact of the proposed schedule change.

In January 2020, Principal 1 offered several slots in his calendar where teachers could meet with him to discuss the bell schedule transition, both in the teachers’ lounge for small groups (up to 3 hours) and in his office for one-on-one meetings; he blocked off 6 hours for these meetings. That same month, according to a document in the bell schedule study committee binder, Principal 1 put forth a proposal for a seven-period bell schedule with an additional 30-minute advisory period. Students who were on track were only required to enroll in six periods, and those who were falling behind were required to enroll in seven periods. Teachers were to teach five of the seven periods. The back page of this document listed one question under a heading, “Superintendent FAQs:” “Will the governing board support a seven-period day with an understanding that it will have an impact on our budget?” The question was answered “yes,” with justification regarding how important it was for students to have access to programs and opportunities. It was unclear whether the superintendent asked this question or answered this question or if Principal 1 was reading what the answer might be.
In the January 2020 board meeting, the superintendent’s update on the long-range plan shared data about other comparable local schools with similar or better test scores. The schools presented had a 4x4 or a trimester schedule, indicating a change in this school’s schedule could help raise student achievement.

In the February 2020 board meeting, the superintendent reiterated the academic achievement goal of the long-range plan—students will perform at top 10% in the county—and the why or guiding principles of the plan, and communicated a sense of urgency for change. He told a story about the reluctance to change and stressed that students would benefit from change, emphasizing, “Our systems may not be working for all our students every day.” During February 2020, Principal 1 also hosted two series of parent meetings to discuss the bell schedules. A total of 41 parent names were reflected in the sign-in sheets of the attendees of these two meetings.

Sometime between February and March 2020, the decision moved from the school principal and his schedule committee back to district-level leadership. The superintendent took a leave of absence in the early spring of 2020 and designated the director of learning and the deputy superintendent of business services to take over the decision-making process while he was out. At the March 2020 board meeting, just days before the district shut down due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, district leaders presented data regarding why there was the need for a schedule change and different scheduling options for the next 2 school years. First, the 2020–2021 schedule was meant to be an interim schedule satisfying the instructional minute requirements. Then, starting with the 2021–2020 school year, the district wanted to adopt a permanent schedule that met the criteria of expanding flexibility and improving student outcomes. During this meeting, the high school principal summarized the process he had
engaged in with his staff over a period of a year and half at the request of the superintendent.

Principal 1 said:

Less than a month after you [the board] approved the long-range plan, Sherford High School was directed and went into action to bring together a bell schedule committee. That committee met four times, starting in December of 2018. At the beginning of this past school year, the MTSS committee and bell committee met together to continue that work. It was then at the request of staff that that process be opened to all staff. So between all of the different meetings, we’ve had more than 23 meetings at the site, including with union leadership to give direction to the process so that there is guidance provided by many different professionals on our campus. I went into eight different classrooms this year also just to get some initial feedback from students, reactions, their opinions, and their past experiences. We also hosted community meetings through either PTO [parent teacher organization] or Coffees with the Principal and various other types of small group meetings.

This accounting of the events did not specifically include the teachers’ clear preference for an eventual seven-period bell schedule, which Principal 1 presented in the November 2019 meeting with the board.

By March 2020, it is likely the district had informed Principal 1 that the board and the district were seeking the 4x4 schedule to be the solution, making it less likely Principal 1 would still mention the seven-period option. Later in the meeting, a board member asked Principal 1 if the teachers had expressed any preference during the 23 meetings that occurred at the site. Principal 1’s response was vague and did not address the question. Instead, he said, “Our local committee recommended that we look at year-long based schedules. So that’s where we are at
this point here today. . . . It is a work in progress.” He did not specify the teachers’ clear preference for a year-long, seven-period bell schedule, a schedule he also seemed to support and recommended.

In the spring of 2020, the committee and staff only proposed a seven-period schedule, which was rejected by the board; thus, they were not any closer to a strong schedule proposal than they had been in December 2018 when the committee was born. At this point, the decision shifted to the district. Principal 1 explained:

The superintendent and his direct reports said, “You’ve had a year and a half. As a staff, you have now proven that the collaborative process is not working for the staff. So we [the district leaders] are going to come in.” So right before the pandemic hit, [two district leaders] scheduled a lunch meeting . . . and I became an observer instead of a facilitator. They listened, asked questions. They left that meeting. And they, again, I don’t know if they would describe it this exact way, but they realized that the collaborative process had been derailed so much that there was no opportunity for recovery and essentially decided we now need to make the decision.

Despite Principal 1’s best efforts to unite the staff in collaboration around the schedule reform, the solution the staff had come up with—a year-long, seven-period bell schedule—was not satisfactory to the district administration as it did not radically address the gaps in opportunities the district had identified. District leaders’ hope all along seemed to have been the staff would support a 4x4 or similar schedule, but the staff was opposed to this schedule. In short, though collaboration occurred and was fruitful, the solution the team came up with fell short of the intended objectives for the reform. The aforementioned lunch meeting happened the week before the pandemic started in mid-March 2020. Principal 1 stated, “So that meeting
occurred and we went into the pandemic. . . . Some weeks after that, the district then announced we’d be going to the 4x4.” In parallel, during the March 2020 school board meeting, school and district officials presented a considerable amount data and alternative schedule proposals, but the board did not make an official decision regarding the schedule for the next 2 school years.

During the public comments section of the March 2020 meeting, a teacher who had participated in the bell schedule study committee referenced a six-period schedule option as a suggestion for the interim 2020–2021 school year. The teacher read the opinions from her eighth-grade students stating support for a six-period bell schedule with slightly longer classes rather than adding a seventh class. The deputy superintendent advised the board he had heard more support for a six-period interim bell schedule and to “go the easy route” given the teachers would require the subsequent year to prepare for a bigger schedule shift the following year.

Also, during that March 2020 meeting, the board president gave an impassioned speech demonstrating urgency to do something drastic and decide on a new schedule that was in the best interests of students by stating:

I’ll have to be honest with you, I am a little embarrassed and ashamed to have to sit up here and tell parents who we promised a better schedule that would accomplish all those things that you told us we’re trying to accomplish with a new schedule in the fall of the coming year. And now I have to tell them we can’t do that. I’m gonna take the blame on that. It’s on me. I don’t know how the other trustees up here feel, but obviously we did not either provide guidance or leadership or whatever we needed to make that happen. So, if you’re parents sitting out there right now. I apologize.
The board member talked about feeling accountable to parents and how the proposed schedule change was already 1 year behind what they had promised parents. The board member further stated it was time for the board to take over the decision and “push it through,” stating:

We didn’t accomplish the main objective, but we haven’t given up on the objective and we are going to push something through. . . . I can’t ask for this on my own, but this is what I’ll propose to the other trustees, that we have to take a more active role to push this thing through. There have been questions over the last year whether or not this is top-down, bottom-up, grassroots, I don’t care. We had a list of things that we were trying to accomplish with the long-range plan to provide our students with better opportunities, and we’re still trying to get that to them. And this will get that to them a year late, but it will get that to them. So as a board member, I am willing to support you in your next steps. Have as many meetings as you have, talk to as many people as you want, talk to as many children as you want. I don’t care who you have to talk to, but on May 14\textsuperscript{th}, when you come to me, we’re going to be looking to vote on a permanent bell schedule change that accomplishes the things that we’ve been trying to accomplish for the last 18 months, [a schedule to begin] in the fall of 2021.

The board member became more insistent on the urgency of what the new schedule was supposed to accomplish and pressured the school and district to present a viable proposal for a vote at the upcoming May board meeting. The board member further analyzed some of the feedback brought by a staff member on behalf of her students and stated:

And I’m going to be really, really upfront with you and tell you that based on some of the things that [the staff member] read to us today about students not wanting seven periods,
well if they don’t want seven and don’t think seven is going to be hectic, let’s just give them four. So that’s kind of where I’m leaning right now, giving you that 4x4.

Based on students’ feedback stating adding one more period would be stressful, the board member further lent support to the 4x4 as the best possible solution. He also acknowledged a 4x4 schedule would represent a big shift for the staff, stating:

And you know what’s going to be really, really hard about that. Is it’s a huge difference in the way teachers are teaching our students day to day right now. So even if we wanted to incorporate a 4x4 in the fall, we probably couldn’t because it’s going to require a bunch of curriculum change, a bunch of training programs, professional development to move from a six-period schedule to a 4x4 schedule.

Recognizing the 4x4 schedule was a bigger shift because it represented not only a change in schedule but also a change in curriculum, the board member agreed more time would be needed to implement the transition. During an interview with a district-level director, they explained events at the board meeting as follows:

And I won’t say contentious isn’t the right word, but it got heated a little bit because the first or second update the high school gave really just had like a six period, seven period option. And that really wasn’t aligned to what the outcomes were that the board wanted to see for our students, right. And that the superintendent’s long range plan, opportunities for acceleration, remediation, exploring your interests and passions, it really wasn’t aligned to those, that structure of the six or seven period days. So I recall in one of those updates that the board had some passionate discussion and questions and said, “This isn’t gonna work. We need a schedule that does X, Y, and Z.” And they were really adamant
that, you know, they felt like a different schedule, not a six- or seven-period day was what was best for our students.

The decision about both the interim schedule and the permanent future schedule was left to subsequent board meetings. At the April 16, 2020 board meeting, the first one held during the COVID-19 global pandemic shutdown via Zoom, the director of learning reported the interim schedule that would be adopted for the 2020–2021 school year was one with a similar structure (i.e., six periods) but slightly longer periods to meet the state’s instructional minutes requirement. The superintendent, who was back from his leave, stated they were letting Principal 1 decide what that interim schedule looked like and trusted him as long as it was compliant with instructional minutes. The board did not need to vote on approving the interim schedule. Ultimately, the interim schedule chosen was a six-period, year-long schedule with 1 day where all classes met and 4 days a week of alternating blocks.

Schools were shut down from mid-March 2020 to early February 2021, so learning took place primarily via Zoom, with some class time dedicated to asynchronous learning. In February 2021, the school opened back up and provided students with a hybrid model, where those who wanted to attend in person for 2 days a week could and those who wanted to continue learning via Zoom were provided the lesson via continuous curriculum delivery. Teachers were also given the option to either return in person or continue teaching from home.

On May 8, 2020, district administration held a Zoom meeting with staff to address concerns regarding the decision to implement the 4x4 schedule. One teacher commented in the chat of the Zoom meeting:

Not sure why this decision HAS to be made at the next board meeting. It would be respectful of everyone to acknowledge that COVID closures changed the game for
everyone. I wish we would settle up the bell schedule for compliance and then table the other optional changes while we wait for a more stable return.

Another teacher said 75% of the teachers already said they did not want to consider the 4x4 schedule, so it was obvious at that point—at least for those who participated in the board meeting—the district was moving forward with the adoption of the 4x4 schedule, despite overwhelming teacher resistance.

During the May 14, 2020 board meeting, the board officially voted to adopt the 4x4 schedule for the 2021–2022 school year. This meeting occurred in the early stages of the COVID-19 global pandemic, though the decision was later questioned again in the spring of 2021 after significant teacher resistance to the reform. This May 2020 meeting was a relatively uneventful meeting, with no members of the public present to comment on it. As that part of the meeting began, one board member stated, “We have no public comment although we did receive some positive support for the 4x4 to an email to the board from one or two parents.” After reviewing the data once more, the board briefly discussed why the decision was being made and the impact of the decision. One board member commented on how long the process had been to eventually arrive at a decision on the new schedule, stating:

Nobody in this town could accuse us of rushing this through. And that’s probably the understatement of the day. We’ve been looking at this for a long time. I believe this is the third time we’ve seen a version of this presentation.

The board member also spoke on district leadership’s recent Zoom meeting with staff, where the staff learned the district was officially going to recommend the 4x4 schedule to the board and where their concerns were addressed, at least in part. The board member said:
I applaud your thoroughness, and just . . . really reaching out to our staff and listening. A few of us sat in on the Zoom meeting last week with staff members who, I don’t know what the percentage of the staff was there, but they did have concern, and you were very, very thoughtful in your comments to them, and you were a great listener, and so thank you for that.

Finally, the board member felt there were a lot more stakeholders in support of the new schedule who had not reached out officially to support the upcoming decision. They said:

We also heard, I think if I would, not fault, but if I would point out anything from this whole process is I don’t feel like we had enough information coming, enough communication with our parents. I think that, I mean we got three letters in support of a 4x4 schedule from parents and I think there are a lot of parents out there that support this. The lack of input and feedback from parents regarding the proposed 4x4 schedule change brings into question the ways in which the decision and its rationale were communicated and how stakeholders were invited to participate and share their opinions. Finally, the board member concluded, in an optimistic note, the district was heading in the right direction by adopting the 4x4 schedule, stating:

Schools across the country are adopting a 4x4 schedule. So, I know we’re on the right track. And I hope that during the next year, not only—I know you will have a very robust plan to work with our teachers on understanding their new pacing and the new format that they’re going to be in. But I also hope that there’s a concerted effort to work with parents and students to really help them realize the potential. And like I said, I think it’s going like wildfire across the country.

After the motion passed unanimously, the superintendent commented:
This has been a long and a thorough process [that started in December 2018] and I’m pleased with the support from the governing board and in conversations with teachers who have taught in both a traditional bell schedule setting and in a block schedule setting. I think we’re just really scratching the surface on potential and opportunities that our staff and our community are going to really embrace. So, I’m excited for the year after next.

During both the problem-framing phrase and the stakeholder input phrase, district staff gathered data and developed a rationale for their support of a schedule change, and, in particular, a support of the 4x4 schedule.

**Phase 3: Preparation and Revolt (2020–2021)**

The 2020–2021 school year was the year prior to full implementation, and administrators focused largely on preparing for the change, training counselors on how to create the new schedule and get everyone signed up, informing parents and students about the differences between this schedule and the previous one and guiding them through the registration process, and providing support for teachers. During this time, the “Revolt” began when a significant teacher resistance group emerged and attempted to reverse the decision. For a detailed description of some major events that happened during Phase 3, please see Appendix D.

Phase 3—the Revolt—began relatively quietly. By fall of 2020, when several teachers became aware the 4x4 schedule had already been adopted by the board in May 2020, three teachers took on a leadership role to plan a strategic revolt against the schedule. Their plan was to await the school board elections, hoping to convince newly elected trustees to overturn the decision, or, at the very least, postpone it.

Around February 2021, talk of concerns from teachers reached the public board meetings, and some of the new board members asked questions regarding teacher concerns about the
schedule change, especially at this time during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The superintendent acknowledged teacher frustrations and concerns as “valid and legitimate.” However, he argued changing to the 4x4 schedule at this time, as already decided, would be less disruptive than going back to the old schedule due to all the changes teachers already had to make to their teaching during the pandemic, some of which aligned with the types of changes needed to successfully teach in a 4x4 schedule.

The Revolt Movement took a political turn when the leaders of the revolt realized they needed to send a stronger message to the board and to the community. They recruited teachers from every department to write and sign letters expressing concern about the new 4x4 schedule to be published in the local paper. These letters to the editor were published in the local newspaper in April 2021 and shared a variety of concerns, especially regarding the impact the schedule would have on the quality of teacher–student relationships.

During the April 2021 board meeting, several teachers were in attendance to express their concerns. The public shared their comments expressing both concern and support. The leader of the teachers’ revolt centered his comments around the decision-making process, which he viewed as having lacked buy-in and respect for the opinions of professional educators. The board expressed concern over teacher opposition to the reform. In a theatrical move, the board president stepped down to the podium where members of the public typically give comments and delivered a long speech in support of the 4x4. In the middle of his speech, he communicated teachers needed to stop resisting the 4x4 or go work elsewhere. No action was taken in this meeting, but the school board decided to hold a special board meeting to discuss whether to rescind the 4x4 decision the following month.
The May 2021 special board meeting included almost 1.5 hours of public comment and over 3 hours of discussion from the board before the decision was reached to uphold the May 2020 decision and proceed with the implementation of the 4x4 schedule in a 3–2 vote, with the two newly-elected trustees voting to rescind the decision and the three who had originally voted for it, voting once more to uphold it. Stakeholders’ responses to the schedule during this revolt phase, and the factors that influenced those responses are discussed at length in Chapter 5. At this point, implementation of the new schedule began the following fall—Fall 2021. Refer to Appendix D for a more detailed description of what happened during the next phase.

**Phase 4: Implementation and Evaluation (2021–2023)**

During the implementation phase, there was turnover of school leadership with a new principal hired. The new principal—Principal 2—was in charge of leading the implementation of the new 4x4 schedule and, when asked about her thoughts on the 4x4 schedule, she commented in the local newspaper:

> I’m glad that students will have access to an expanded course of study in both the core curricular and elective pathways as well as an opportunity to access more experiences and deepen their scope of knowledge . . . our students are lucky to have great teachers and a supportive staff to guide and champion them.

In addition to a new principal, there was a new position created for an instructional coach who was meant to support teachers through the schedule implementation. In October 2021, the school pushed out a whole-staff survey on the transition where teachers could report supports needed for implementation. There were 35 responses to the survey, but it is unclear whether any additional administrative actions followed to provide teachers with their reported needs.
Between 2022 and 2023, community tensions during board meetings erupted again, this time in relation to concerns about the 4x4 schedule among a long list of other topics, such as an athletic event with racial undertones that had occurred a couple of years prior, social-emotional learning, equity, and an LGBTQIA+ training that led conservative community members to accuse those on the other side of the political spectrum as “lacking of civility” and “engaging in harmful name calling.” Several letters to the local paper from different community members reflected these tensions. These letters were also deployed for political means, to get new and different school board members elected. Community disagreement with the 4x4 schedule was weaponized during this election. One letter accused the superintendent of rewarding the school’s former principal with a promotion in exchange for “passing” the 4x4 schedule. The community member wrote:

Now before you start calling me a conspiracy theorist, let’s look at the superintendent’s recent history. Two years ago, [the] high school principal went against the wishes of 95% of the teachers and backed the superintendent’s 4x4 plan. As a reward for his loyalty and since he’d lost the confidence of the teachers, the superintendent created the new position of director of special programs and gave the job to the principal. If that wasn’t bad enough, the district (and taxpayers) have to pay him an amount equal to his principal’s salary and benefits of $180,966, for a job that could be filled for probably half that amount. Are you, the taxpayer, ok with that? These are just a few of the many reasons why I will not support any current or past board members or district employees. It’s time we elect school board members who will hold the administration accountable, who bring a fresh perspective and who aren’t ok with the status quo. It’s time we get back to academic excellence.
Other than wanting to “hold the superintendent accountable” for passing a schedule that was unpopular, some of these letters to the editor pointed to concerns regarding the instructional minutes that some students are receiving. The letter writer stated:

Under the current 4x4 schedule, about 50% of the students are taking three classes instead of four classes therefore only getting 4.5 hours of daily instruction instead of six. How is that in their best interest? That is something I have asked the superintendent, the director of learning and the principal, and not one of them has been able to explain how that is in THEIR best interest. I don’t blame the kids. What teenager, given the option, wouldn’t choose a lighter load? I blame the administration. When 4x4 was approved, 97% of the teachers were against it. So, you have to ask, then why would they adopt it?

Nationwide, California schools are ranked 44th, so how is less in-class instruction supposed to help?

The fact that the school did not mandate for students to take the full four courses—they could elect three—was problematic, from the point of view that one important purpose of the schedule was to create space for more courses. Community members’ concerns about instructional minutes were very legitimate indeed.

These concerns and political motivations to transform the school board led to the Fall 2022 board elections having several candidates who wanted to get rid of the 4x4 schedule as one of their main issues. Only one of those candidates made it through the final election and one of his first proposals to the board led to the formation of a board 4x4 subcommittee to conduct a “360 evaluation” of the schedule, after the public once more called on board members to evaluate the impacts of and concerns around the 4x4 schedule. The newly-elected board member stated, in an interview with the local paper:
I’ve been skeptical of it (the 4x4 schedule) and I was open to revising it or changing it . . . so where is the truth? Just because it hasn’t worked especially well for my family, how is it working for the community? So that was really the origin of the committee . . . I was the one who sort of spearheaded the creation of the committee to kind of review the new block schedule, which is of course the 4x4, and I think it was to make sure that we included and were listening to all of our stakeholder groups.

This committee had one representative from the public appointment by each board member and was in charge of communicating with all stakeholders to learn about how the implementation of the 4x4 was going, according to Parent 1. The board subcommittee caused waves among community members when, in February 2023, they voted for their initial meetings to remain closed to the public. The letter writer shared:

Why the secrecy? Why was there no public announcement of the date, time, or place of its first meeting? Why was there no disclosure from the district of who was selected to serve? Where is the promised transparency? If the superintendent’s goal is to achieve public support for his educational programs, then input from parents and teachers should be welcomed, and he should not try to manipulate and control a committee’s findings. Meetings need to be open, and information (unless it is confidential) needs to be made readily available to the public.

All these letters to the editor revealed vigorous community dialogue around school initiatives, with some members of the public very critical of district administration.

One subcommittee member who had also unsuccessfully run for the school board ended up quitting the committee. A newspaper article reported, “He left the group after advocating for change and accountability among district leadership . . . [and felt] committee was stacked with
people who are not willing to challenge the district, and it had a number of poorly attended public forums, except for the faculty feedback session.” The former committee member also cited differences with other members of the committee who “accused him of wanting to use it as a springboard to run for office in 2 years.”

After its evaluation period, the committee found the new bell schedule worked well for most students and parents, but there were still a significant number of stakeholders who had concerns. However, despite their concerns, “they do not support reverting back to the old schedule,” according to May 2023 board meeting notes. The committee understood its role as purely advisory and provided recommendations for the high school to consider regarding how to improve and tweak certain aspects of the schedule stakeholders were concerned about.

During the May 2023 board meeting, the board member who initiated the formation of the 360-evaluation committee stated:

I think it’s worth addressing that for me, I did not hear the sort of groundswell of opposition that would be necessary to make such a drastic change (going back to the old schedule), and I do value the input from various stakeholders that it would be disruptive to go back. I absolutely agree with keeping an open mind and I think that what we all need to do now is to the best of our extent possible, we need to make this current schedule work as best as we can.

Hence, it seems after a long period of community input, which began in 2018, the case of the adoption of the 4x4 schedule was put to rest in May 2023.

In March 2023, the high school sent a survey to teachers regarding how they felt about different aspects of the bell schedule, 2 years into implementation. Although the survey results showed most teachers agreed they were able to complete essential course standards in each
term—8.3% strongly agreed, 45.8% agreed, 20.8% were neutral, 16.7 disagreed, and 8.3% strongly disagreed—70% of teachers felt the term was not an adequate amount of time for building student connections, which was one of their major concerns when the schedule was adopted. In the open-ended comments, teachers commented they enjoyed their increased preparatory time but still encountered major challenges, especially with the speedy pace and stress, difficulty of sustaining student attention for the whole period, and strain on teacher–student relationships because there was less time to build them. One teacher commented:

Our school is too small to fill out this schedule. It makes it statistically impossible to add flexibility. We pointed this out back in 2019. When this idea was floated we were told the point of it was to help kids who were falling behind to get caught up. At the time we had over 98% graduation rate. Maybe five or less kids would not graduate a year. I don’t think it’s possible to get to 100%. We offered solutions and were completely ignored so that the prior admin could implement this idea, and I’m not sure if it’s working. I think kids are under more pressure and maybe are failing more than before.

Even 2 years into implementation, there were still teachers who felt they were not “heard,” and it would likely take a long time to repair the trust that was lost.

In November 2023, midway through the 3rd year of implementation, the data presented by the high school on a variety of metrics supported steady growth in student outcomes; although, of course, the effects of any single intervention cannot be easily measured nor seen until years later in the field of K–12 education. A steady and upward trend can be seen about high school graduation rates and percentage of students graduating college-ready, as defined by meeting the University of California A–G eligibility requirements (see Tables 7 and 8). Figures 2–4 include data regarding assessment results.
Table 7

*Sherford High School Graduation Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Sherford High School Percentage of Students Meeting A–G Requirements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2

Sherford High School Post High School Activities Class of 2023

Note. N = 267. From School Board Report, November 2023

Figure 3

Sherford High School College and Career Readiness Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Graduation Rate</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Fulfilled UC/CSU a-g Requirements</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% State Seals of Biliteracy</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTE Completers</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Exams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of exams taken</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students tested</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of qualifying scores</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. From School Board Report, November 2023
The AP testing data showed a significant dip in 2020–2021 that can likely be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The 1st year of the 4x4 schedule implication showed this dip recovering to near previous achievement levels. The school was also strengthening its scores on state accountability exams for mathematics, English, and science. Another data point the district looked at when making the decision to switch to the 4x4 schedule was the number of Ds and Fs at the high school. Data in Figure 5 show the number of Ds and Fs decreased significantly.
One of the major rationales for adopting the 4x4 schedule was a call for more opportunities. As the Table 9 illustrates, access to different types of courses and opportunities to prepare for careers expanded tremendously.

Table 9

Expansion of Opportunities at Sherford High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of opportunity</th>
<th>Description of how it expanded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pathways</td>
<td>14 pathway opportunities: performing arts (9 pathways), health sciences and biomedical science (2), computer science (1), building and construction (1), and engineering technology (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual and concurrent enrollment</td>
<td>Dual enrollment: Courses for which students get both high school and college credit. These are taught on campus by college professors. Courses offered 2023–2024: Intro to Business, American Sign Language 1 (2 sections), American Sign Language 2 (145 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of opportunity</td>
<td>Description of how it expanded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses offered</td>
<td>Courses offered 2022–2023: Intro to Business, Medical Terminology, American Sign Language (2 sections), Chicana(o) Studies (135 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Courses offered 2021–2022: Intro to Administration of Justice, Medical Terminology, Intro to Business, Cybersecurity (84 students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concurrent enrollment</td>
<td>Concurrent enrollment: Students taking a course at local community college and at the high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2022–2023: 15 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2023–2024: 32 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships/work experience</td>
<td>At least 9 community partners are providing these experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2022–2023: 47 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2023–2024: 58 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to world languages</td>
<td>Sealing of biliteracy awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019–2020: 36 graduates awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020–2021: 49 graduates awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2021–2022: 47 graduates awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2022–2023: 52 graduates awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New courses available</td>
<td>Math IM2 Advanced and IM3 Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engineering Pathway capstone course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engineering Design &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundations of IM 1 coupled with Integrated Math 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 additional courses submitted and approved for A–G through University of California Office of the President</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the criticisms of the vocal group of parents in the community addressed the school did not make it mandatory for students to take all four classes under the 4x4 schedule, leaving these parents feeling as though the school was doing a disservice to students. Although it was true the school did not force students to take full advantage of the 4x4 by enrolling in all four courses for all 4 years, the data in Table 10 demonstrated over time, the number of students opting to have free periods decreased. With increased education and counseling for both parents and students, more and more students will no doubt take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the schedule.
Table 10

Students Opting for Free Periods at Sherford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Off roll both terms</th>
<th>Off roll Term 1 only</th>
<th>Off roll Term 2 only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>21–22</td>
<td>22–23</td>
<td>23–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>23–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>23–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>23–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon examining these data, and in combination with the qualitative data generated by the 4x4 board subcommittee, it seemed as though the 4x4 schedule has brought a lot of benefits to Sherford High School, though some concerns lingered. In the next chapter, I focus my analysis to provide answers to the research questions as to why the schedule change was decided and on the stakeholders’ reactions to the decision-making process that emerged during this phase.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

This qualitative case study of Sherford High School’s contentious decision-making process to reform the schedule revealed insights into how school leaders implemented change and gained support from stakeholders. After conducting semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, analyzing related documents, and presenting some of the findings from those interviews in the previous chapter, I identified and described four phases of the decision and developed a detailed timeline to make the events that unfolded more clear. In this chapter, I present the most important themes that emerged regarding why the decision was made, stakeholders’ responses to it, and the factors that shaped those responses.

The primary research questions that guided this research were:

1. Why did the district decide to change the schedule?
2. How did different stakeholders respond to the decision?
3. What factors’ shaped stakeholders’ responses?

Overview of Findings

In response to why the district decided to adopt a schedule change, I found the main reasons were to:

- improve college readiness academic outcomes, improve career readiness, and expand coursework;
- provide more equitable access to opportunities;
- align with vision and compete with similar high schools in the area;
- respond to the call from parents to create more opportunities for students; and
- comply with mandated instructional minutes.
The district’s main rationale for the schedule change was to improve student outcomes and address compliance issues with instructional minutes. School administrators’ data about student outcomes revealed a gap in terms of college and career readiness. The district also identified an equity gap between affluent parents in “the know” and the rest of the parents. During a public board meeting, one of the board members stated, in support of the new four-by-four (4x4) schedule:

My daughter was one of those that struggled. It wasn’t through halfway through the school year that I realized what a lot of other parents were doing that were in the know... [they] could ensure better kind of a competitive edge at other universities. . . . But my question would be, why not give every child every day that opportunity to be challenged at school and provide them the maximum array of educational opportunities at the school district?

Having experienced an equity gap herself when she realized other parents were accessing resources beyond what the district provided to better prepare their own kids, the board member expressed the need for ensuring every student had access to a variety of opportunities. The district viewed the six-period, year-long schedule as too limiting and thought the 4x4 schedule could expand opportunities. Ultimately, they made the change to benefit students.

When examining how the various stakeholders responded to the schedule change, the following themes emerged:

- Most teachers revolted against the decision,
- Decision was viewed as top-down,
- Some parents opposed the decision, and
- Most parents trusted the decision.
The most significant stakeholder reaction to the decision was the teachers’ revolt. For example, Teacher 2 stated:

My sense was this was something that the board at the time wanted to do and they had convinced themselves that it was the right thing for the school . . . And so they heard from who they wanted to hear from, and they asked the teachers what we thought but it didn’t impact their decision, obviously. I don’t want to say for sure it was unanimous, but if not unanimous, then pretty close to it that every single teacher was not in favor of it.

Teachers’ resistance against the schedule was clear and widespread, which led to a teachers’ revolt in which they attempted to reverse the decision, a revolt that was unsuccessful. Teachers opposed the new schedule because they had major concerns about whether the schedule would truly best serve students’ needs. They felt the decision had not been data-driven and their suggestions about strategies for addressing the gaps had been ignored. Moreover, teachers accused district officials of having financial and egoic motivations for the decision. Most stakeholders—administrators included—described the decision as top-down. Administrators rationalized the necessity for top-down decision making, and teachers were angry about it. Most parents, except a small and vocal group, supported the decision.

Finally, after analyzing various stakeholders’ responses, I identified some important factors that shaped those responses:

- Lack of dialogue around decision making,
- Lack of trust between teachers and school administrators,
- Lack of clarity about decision-making models,
- Lack of effective and widespread communication,
- The impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic,
● Lack of support for the superintendent from a group of vocal parents, and
● Lack of meaningful professional development.

Throughout the schedule reform process, though stakeholders had been asked to provide input, many felt they had not truly had the chance to contribute alternative solutions—other than a schedule change—to the challenges identified. One teacher stated:

A change in the bell schedule isn’t a magic bullet that will result in schoolwide practices aimed at supporting struggling students without the time and the strategies to drive that change. My peers and I have a wealth of ideas as to how this can be explored schoolwide, but no one has asked us.

The lack of opportunities to look for problems dialogically together led stakeholders, and in particular teachers, to feel like they had not truly been meaningfully included in the decision-making process, which led to a lack of trust. The following section includes further details about each of these major findings regarding the district’s motivations for the change, stakeholders’ responses to it, and the factors that shaped those responses.

The Reasons Why Behind the Schedule Change

Several factors motivated the decision to make a schedule change at Sherford High School, such as improving college and career readiness, improving academic outcomes, expanding coursework, and providing equitable access to opportunities. Moreover, the district perceived a schedule change as a key strategy to align to its vision, boost its competitiveness in the region, and respond to parents’ desires. Finally, the district was out of compliance with instructional minutes required by the state, so a schedule change was necessary.
College Readiness and Academic Outcomes

The decision to change Sherford High School’s schedule from a traditional, six-period day to a 4x4 schedule was mainly driven by the district’s desire to improve students’ academic outcomes. Though graduation rates at the high school were high per the school’s accountability report card (95%+), the school’s percentage of students who were graduating college-ready, as defined by meeting the California A–G College Requirements, was subpar (60). The California A–G College Requirements delineate a set of courses students must take and a grade point average they must maintain while in high school to be eligible for admission to the University of California (UC, n.d.) system. Falling rates of UC eligibility were due to the UC system increasing the number of courses required for admission. The 24 classes available over 4 years in the traditional schedule “no longer met the need . . . no longer allowed students to meet the minimum UC A–G requirements,” according to Principal 1. Students needed more space in their schedule to meet the UC A–G requirements. Teacher 5 explained, “If we had stayed on our old schedule, students would not have been able to take electives and still be UC eligible . . . if they failed a math class there was just no opportunity to make it up.”

To increase college readiness, students also needed more opportunities for remediation. In the fall of 2019, for instance, 19% of the students at the high school had at least one D or F grade, which rendered them ineligible for California colleges; however, opportunities to remediate were scarce in the old schedule. Moreover, a deep-dive into the data revealed 74% of students who had graduated and were not A–G-eligible had become “off-track” by the end of their sophomore year and had never been able to catch up. Principal 1 explained:

If you got a D in [math], and maybe it was a life situation and not necessarily your skill. Maybe a major trauma happened in the family and just your ability to balance school
[and] life was low. Now, that student had to take away another class from the next school year and retake it. Or take it over summer, but the percentage of our students that took our online summer program at that time was very low. And one of the statements I remember making frequently was, how many of us adults has had a 4-year span of our life where something big hasn’t happened? Like life happens and so for something to occur in a high schooler’s life and for it to impact where they can go after high school is not necessarily a supportive structure.

Recognizing external events beyond their control can sometimes impact students’ college eligibility, providing more opportunities for remediation became an important rationale for the change. Though a seven-period schedule would have provided four more spots for students who needed to remediate, Principal 1 explained the 4×4 schedule was more advantageous because if a student failed a class in the fall term, they could just retake it in the spring term, rather than having to wait until the following school year.

Parent 1 said, “In the old schedule, it was impossible to fit in all those [A–G] classes.” Parents also felt there was not enough space in the six-period schedule for rigorous coursework. The degree to which parents were aware of these A–G requirements also came into question. Parent 1 told an anecdote about another family who had found out about the A–G requirements while on a college visit, stating:

They found out that [even] the minimum requirements [might not be enough] . . . they were told at the college visit that they would actually not consider you when you only had 2 years [of foreign language, which was the minimum requirement]. But it was too late for their kid to do 3 years . . . those parents were extremely disappointed that they found out when it was too late . . . they would have qualified if they had been aware of the A–G
requirements, but then they also told me that even had they been aware, with the old system where you can only do 24 classes, it would have been very hard to qualify. So, one of the things of the 4x4 was, more kids would qualify for the A–G requirements when they graduate from high school.

This anecdote, although only about one family, illustrates the previous schedule was not meeting the needs of students regarding California college admission criteria and also raised some questions about school and district communication with parents about the A–G requirements.

Principal 1 acknowledged not all students were interested in a California college, but stressed the A–G requirements were “a benchmark for a college-going population; what UC requires is really good for you to have to be successful at your out-of-state college and [for out-of-state admissions].” The superintendent added, “The UC/CSU [California State University] graduation requirements mirror or are very similar to a lot of those competitive schools.”

A board member at the time also highlighted the need to improve academics as the main reason for a schedule reform by stating:

The superintendent and the district were interested in improving our academic scores [and student’s D/F grades]. And also he realized that we had A–G issues that we weren’t qualifying. So he started a study where he investigated a range of different options for [bell schedules].

Boosting the school’s academic outcomes was the main factor driving the decision to switch schedules. The district also wanted to better prepare students for life beyond high school.

**Career Readiness and Expanded Coursework**

The district wanted to expand opportunities to prepare students for their futures. The 4x4 schedule would increase spots for coursework from 24 classes to 32, which would enable more
students to complete career and technical education (CTE) pathways. CTE completion is defined as a student taking two CTE classes in the same subject (e.g., woodworking and advanced woodworking), according to principal. Increasing this data point would benefit the school’s career readiness score from the state. Principal 1 further explained, “We had evidence that [students] likely had an interest in CTE, but when I looked at their 4-year plan, there was no room to take an advanced CTE course.” The motivation to increase the school’s rating on career readiness and provide interested students with more opportunities to take CTE courses was another reason to reform the schedule.

Evolving conceptions of what it means to be career-ready called for a change because now, as Principal 1 said, “You really need to leave high school very well rounded because the careers that they’re going to do don’t exist yet . . . a traditional finish English, finish math, finish science no longer really fit with that.” Principal 1 suggested the goals of the traditional education system have become increasingly out of date with the realities of the 21st-century job market. Changing the schedule represented an opportunity to open space in student schedules for them to pursue internships; work experience; CTE coursework; dual enrollment coursework; and more access to robotics, engineering, and computer programming courses, among other opportunities, to better prepare them for careers beyond high school.

The district also wanted to offer a variety of opportunities beyond the curriculum, such as more dual enrollment courses that award students both college and high school credit. World languages and arts classes could also be expanded. The arts were a significant focus of the district, and it was one of the few districts in the area with an arts magnet program. The district-level director referred to the old six-period bell schedule as limiting because “kids were having to make tough choices [between] art, language, or remediat[ing failed courses].” The
superintendent also alluded to those “difficult decisions” students were having to make due to lack of space in the six-period schedule. He said, “We have a pretty extensive menu [of coursework] but we weren’t building enrollment in those courses because the kids didn’t have opportunities in [the] bell schedule.” A board member, also motivated to provide better opportunities for students than those he could give his sons who had graduated from the high school, stated:

I didn’t want to pass up on [giving] students those opportunities. Only one of [my three sons] ever had the opportunity to take ceramics, and he loved it. The others couldn’t fit in their schedules.

The schedule change would provide students with more time and space to accelerate their learning, remediate, and take fun electives and internships/job opportunities in areas they were passionate about, all in the hopes of better preparing them for their futures. Furthermore, disrupting inequity was also a major concern of the district.

**Equitable Access to Opportunities**

During the problem-framing phase, the district found many affluent students who wanted to access the top colleges were paying for college courses and other opportunities outside the high school. The superintendent explained:

Close to 20 to 25% of our students [were] taking courses [elsewhere] during the summer. We felt there’s a disconnect here and there’s an access and equity component here. The parents who were sending their children to those schools have the means and also understand the game. That’s not every family that we serve.

Moreover, families who “understood the game” would ensure their student was well-positioned in their middle school coursework to benefit their high school career. The superintendent added,
“If a student wasn’t in a specific math course in eighth grade, they would never reach the advanced placement calculus courses; so we were tracking students . . . unless those students took courses off campus.” This gap between those in the know and those who were not and between those with means and those without the means was also apparent in who was taking these courses.

One parent also alluded to the set of parents who were “in the know.” Parent 1 stated, “With the old system [taking enough math and science] is practically impossible . . . so parents had their kids do extra math in the summer or extra AP classes in the summer [as early as] middle school.” Not all parents had access to this knowledge or the ability to best prepare their kids. Hence, the superintendent asked himself, “Why are we okay or comfortable with 20% of our seniors who graduate having to take courses off campus to create the course of study that they want for their high school experience?”

The superintendent explained remediation opportunities were limited under the old schedule, forcing students to either go outside the district or give up one of their courses to recover their credits. Because the “pass rates in the credit recovery program weren’t moving the needle to the degree that [they] felt,” there was a growing equity gap. The superintendent wanted to provide more opportunities for remediation “without [them] giving up some of the amazing courses that [they] offer on that campus.”

The equity gap was also exposed by one board member at the May 2021 board meeting when she spoke of her own family’s experience in the district. She said:

And that leads me to our talks that we started last year in this board as to equity, educational equity. I was a single parent when I moved here to Sherford on a limited income. My daughter’s father didn’t give me a dollar since we moved here and since she
was born. I saved, I found the best apartment that I could afford just for the schools. And I know I speak for a lot of families that struggled just to come here. . . . My daughter was one of those that struggled. It wasn’t through halfway through the school year that I realized what a lot of other parents were doing that were in the know. They could afford to off-source, afford to pay for tutors, afford to pay for classes that were not offered at the school, precisely so that it could ensure better kind of a competitive edge at other universities . . . I don’t wish that on anybody to have to sacrifice their money. Sometimes it was food, sometimes it was rent, sometimes it was car, to be able to make my daughter be able to be competitive with maybe somebody more affluent. But my question would be, why not give every child every day that opportunity to be challenged at school and provide them the maximum array of educational opportunities at the school district?

This powerful testimony by the board member made the divide between the affluent and those not as privileged very clear. The district wanted to mitigate this equity gap, by ensuring all students would have the same access to courses that would prepare them for their futures.

**Alignment to Vision With a Competitive Spirit**

The decision to change the schedule was also aligned with the superintendent’s long-range plan. This plan—adopted by the school board in November 2018—envisioned preparing graduates for life beyond high school, by ensuring they “perform[ed] in the top 10% of the county, as measured by a variety of metrics and assessments.” The 4x4 schedule was seen as a key strategy to accomplish that goal. The school wanted to compete against similar high-achieving schools in similarly affluent areas but with higher academic outcomes and a 4x4 schedule. Comparing itself to these schools, the district found their A–G graduation rate was significantly lower. The top school in the county, for instance, had an A–G graduation rate of
76%–16% higher than Sherford High School; that high school used a 4x4 schedule. Additionally, though advanced placement (AP) scores were fairly high at Sherford High (84%), they were higher at this comparison school (91%). Other similar schools with higher student achievement data, such as AP passing rates, had either a 4x4 or a trimester schedule. A board member stated:

The kids at [Comparable School], when it comes to student achievement, I hate to say it, but they eat our kids’ lunch every year, year after year. Do they have better schools than we have? Do they have better facilities? Do they have better teachers? Are their parents more supportive than our parents? Do they have better textbooks than our kids have?

Nope. But they have a 4x4.

This sense of competition, in addition to the 4x4 being perceived as a key strategy in alignment with the superintendent’s long-range plan of ensuring Sherford High School students would perform in the top 10% of the county, also drove district leaders to want to change the schedule.

**A Call From Parents to Create More Opportunities for Students**

The board’s decision was in part a response to a call from parents to increase opportunities for their children. Parents shared their desires through a ThoughtExchange, or a virtual opportunity for stakeholders to give input. The ThoughtExchange on college and career readiness had 307 participants, 252 ideas, and 8,119 ratings. Parents were asking for more flexibility and options for their kids (including more space for CTE courses, dual enrollment, world languages, AP/honors, and vocational training). Parents also wanted the school to teach life skills, such as budget/personal finance and time management, and provide more internship, work experience, and job shadowing opportunities for their kids.

It was unclear how long this virtual ThoughtExchange was open nor how it was advertised to the community, but it seemed to be a key source of data for the district on parents’
opinions about their children’s needs. District leaders also wanted more options and to better prepare students for their future, so there was alignment between community desires and district leaders’ motivation for a change. Though the results of the virtual ThoughtExchange indicated parents wanted the aforementioned opportunities, there was no mention of parents asking for a schedule change.

It was unclear whether and how often the district held other opportunities for parents to give feedback in person or narrow in on the types of strategies and programs they suggested to bring about these expanded opportunities. It appears the district interpreted the parent call for more opportunities as necessitating a schedule change. In summary, the district saw the six-period, year-long schedule was no longer providing enough space for students, and the reform was deemed to be one of the key strategies for providing the increased flexibility parents were demanding. Sherwood High School would also have had to change its schedule regardless to address issues of compliance.

The District Was Out of Compliance With Instructional Minutes

Another very clear impetus for the schedule change was the district was out of compliance with the state of California for the number of instructional minutes provided students, given the state was no longer counting the optional zero period the school used in the past as part of the required instructional minutes for students. In November 2019, the assistant superintendent of business services shared, “We have received word that in 2021, the school day will need to be longer [to avoid financial penalties].” Principal 1 further explained the school had not been audited by the state, but that the district “w[as] out of compliance and it needed to be changed.”
Principal 1 also spread the message to teachers and students by stating, “The school day [would] . . . be almost an hour longer, and that will impact all of us as employees.” Being out of compliance with instructional minutes represented an opportunity to make a more drastic change. Principal 1 said, “That was actually good timing in a sense . . . [we] had to make a change anyways. Why not provide kids with more opportunities?” In other words, the district had to change the high school’s schedule, regardless of which new schedule model they picked, so this motivated the administration to ask questions regarding what kind of schedule would best serve students’ needs.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Sherford High School students were falling behind similar districts in the county and the clear connection between the six-period, year-long schedule and those limited opportunities, many stakeholders resisted the official decision to change to a 4x4 schedule, in particular teachers during Phase 3. Phase 3 was one of confrontation and revolt and spanned from Spring 2020, when the official decision was made, to Summer 2021, when the implementation of the new schedule began. During this phase, as district administration prepared for the change, teachers called for a closer look at the decision-making process, including who was involved and how the decision was made, culminating in the decision being challenged at the board level, and, eventually, upheld. The following section discusses the various stakeholder responses that emerged starting with the official decision in May 2020.

**Stakeholders’ Responses to the Decision**

Stakeholders’ responses to the decision included resistance from teachers and a small but vocal group of parents. Even parents and other stakeholders who agreed with the decision also perceived it as a top-down decision.
The Teachers’ Revolt

When the board adopted the 4x4 schedule in the May 2020 meeting, several staff who had not regularly attended board meetings were unaware of its passing. Teacher 6 stated, “I kept saying to them, ‘you guys, the decision’s already been made. You need to watch the April or May [2020] board meeting from the year before.’ And they just didn’t believe it.” Three of the teachers who had been “bewildered” and “riled up” about the decision led a strategic movement to revolt against the 4x4 decision from 2020 to 2021. Part of their strategy was to wait until after the school board elections, hoping to appeal to the newly sworn in school board members to overturn the 4x4 decision. Principal 1 characterized the leaders of the teachers’ revolt as follows, stating:

Some voices who had been 100% or very much passive, meaning even being asked to participate, made explicit choices not to, all of a sudden those voices became loud. The loud, negative voices did not honor the process [their peers] had been through [and] derailed the process. So literally train tracks halt, completely railroaded the process.

Having not been involved previously, the revolt leaders hoped to reverse the decision. When asked to speculate about why these staff members chose to revolt, Principal 1 explained he believed change was hard and “a coping mechanism may be to avoid change instead of fully engaging and giving input on change,” an opinion shared by others in district-level administration and board members. As the district-level director stated, “[Talk about the schedule] bubbled up again [among] staff . . . ‘we don’t want to change, and we’re in COVID. We need to go back to our—we need to keep our schedule.’” According to the district-level director, staff were probably trying to “gain traction” with the new board members to overturn the decision due to fear of change. However, as the study on the timeline revealed, these teachers
had already ruled out the 4x4 as a proposal and probably did not imagine the board would vote on a proposal that they had explicitly rejected, which partially explains why these quiet voices might have suddenly become loud.

The three faculty who led the revolt met with board members and met with the superintendent. Teacher 6 indicated they were “questioning why, why he was dismissing decades, centuries total of academic experience at Sherford High, because they felt dismissed.” The superintendent reported, during this meeting, the three faculty members stated they believed they would “win” this fight to reverse the decision. The superintendent said:

If I zoom out from this entire process, I believe it became emotional and I believe that it became competitive on [both] sides. . . . When I hear from teachers, “We’re not going to lose this. We don’t lose, we will win,” and when I hear administrators or board members saying “We direct the work,” we’re now not talking about the why. It’s either you’re with us or you’re against us. And that to me has been the most unhealthy and destructive component of all of this. And it saddens me as someone who cares deeply about every single teacher on that campus that it devolved into that. I don’t think we all modeled professional behavior at some point and that saddens me.

A board member also felt upset about the Revolt Movement, stating:

It was upsetting to me that I would wake up one morning and find in the [local newspaper], you know, a group of nine or so letters, and then get emails from staff that those things were unsatisfactory to them. So, to me, it would have been time much better [use of their time] to prepare to do this than to . . . try one last push at the final hour to get the board to change their mind. It was to me just not the right way to go about doing
business and upset me very much that I would get blindsided by such a rally. I knew there
was discontent, but I wasn’t expecting an all-out revolt.

The board member expressed feeling blindsided and upset at what he described as a teacher
revolt against the decision. Intense emotions, both from the teachers’ ends and from the
administrative and board of education side, took over and turned the decision-making process
into an emotional fight; it became more about winning and less about what was best for the
students.

Teacher 6 did not believe the efforts of the revolt leaders would bear fruit, stating she was
“cautiously pessimistic about the whole thing.” The revolt leaders were hoping to “appeal to the
humanity of the board” and at least delay implementation (if not altogether cancel the change) by
at least 1 year; but, as Teacher 6 explained, “They wouldn’t even meet us there . . . [the] ‘every
child every day’ [slogan], like, really? So who does that actually apply to?” Teachers continually
questioned whether the district was truly doing this in the best interest of students.

**Teacher Concerns About the Decision**

In April 2021, a long editorial of about 15 pages composed by 42 of the 61 teachers at the
high school appeared in the local newspaper. Each department crafted a letter expressing their
similar concerns about the 4x4 schedule, such as the (a) difficulty of covering the required
material with less time, (b) negative effects on relationships between teachers and students, (c)
negative impact on student learning, (d) negative impact on students’ mental health, and (e) lack
of time for planning and professional development.

A significant concern echoed in the interviews with the teachers was adjusting to the pace
of the 4x4 schedule, which required compressing curriculum to a much shorter span of time.
Teacher 2 stated, “As somebody who teaches an AP class, I was concerned about the pace and
just having less time to cover content that really had to be covered.” Teachers also felt reducing the classes to 1 semester would significantly impact teacher–student relationships, as Teacher 2 said, “I just didn’t like the idea of only seeing my students for half the year. Especially as seniors, it’s a really meaningful thing getting to be with them all the way through to the end.”

Some of the concerns were logistical in nature. Because of the relatively small size of the high school, and the fact that the comparison schools with a 4x4 schedule were bigger, the teachers did not think the schedule would work well at Sherford High School, according to Teachers 1, 2, and 6. Teacher 2 explained:

[In bigger schools, you can offer more electives,] but with our size, it just wasn’t possible to; where were those other classes gonna come from? What teachers were going to be hired, where was the money to pay those teachers going to come from, what were these new classes going to be? We just didn’t have the size of staff and students to really fill those extra spaces that would be created in the schedule.

Teachers did not believe the 4x4 schedule was the appropriate solution to the problems presented in such a unique context as theirs. Sherford High School was the only high school in the district and had a high percentage of military-connected students, an arts magnet program, and a student body of just over 1,000 students. They believed it was too small and the student population too unique for the 4x4 schedule to work, both logistically and in terms of the wide variety of student needs and career paths. Teacher 6 commented:

There are very few, if any, schools that are as small as we are, the single high school in the district with the [military] population we have and . . . [our] magnet School of Arts. And so, we were trying to fit a square peg into an octagonal hole because we have so many other facets.
Parent 1 also alluded to the uniqueness of the Sherford School District as a rationale for why implementing a 4x4 in such a district might be slightly problematic, stating:

There are also lots of other people not necessarily in search of academic excellence or a different kind of excellence . . . in other school districts where there are multiple high schools, [so] you can pick and choose [which schedule you want]. [Here] we’re sort of a unicorn.

The lack of school choice was a theme brought up by teachers as well. They simply did not feel the 4x4 schedule was a good option for all students.

*Teachers Accused the District of Having Financial Motivations for the Decision*

There was also a significant group of teachers who were convinced the district was making the decision to save money. Teacher 1 said, “I will also tell you my own personal opinion, and I know other people share it, [the 4x4] was a money-saving proposition for them. I wish they would have just come out and said it, but they didn’t.” Teacher 6 agreed:

So my personal opinion why this decision was made, I think it was financial. So just to give you an idea, we’re in the process of moving towards basic aid. And there are several sites in this district that have always been told that they’re overstaffed, ours in particular. And when the process was started, one of the things that [the deputy superintendent of business services] presented at a board meeting was the cost of a six-period day, a seven-period day, an A/B block day, and a 4x4 schedule. And it was very clear that it was slanted towards some kind of block schedule.

Indeed, in the May 2020 report, the fiscal impact of different schedule models were compared (see Figure 6).
Figure 6

*Fiscal Impact of Different Schedule Models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITIES</th>
<th>6-Period</th>
<th>7-Period</th>
<th>Expanded Block</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staffing Requirements: Full-Time Equivalents (FTE)</td>
<td>41.4 FTE</td>
<td>48.2 FTE</td>
<td>46.0 FTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Level FTE</td>
<td>Potential Increase of 6.8 FTE above base</td>
<td>Potential Increase of 4.6 FTE above base</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Cost at $75K per FTE</td>
<td></td>
<td>Potential Increase of $510,000</td>
<td>Potential Increase of $345,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* School-identifying information was redacted in this screenshot.

Figure 6 suggests the school was already overstaffed at 49.4 full-time employees (FTEs) when the current need was only 41.4. The “expanded block” or 4x4 schedule had a lower cost than the seven-period schedule, and the six-period schedule was the status quo, which needed to change to meet the call for more opportunities, improve college and career readiness outcomes, and address compliance issues. Teacher 6’s analysis that the financials presented by the board “slanted” toward a block schedule was accurate.

Moreover, many staff believed the decision had been motivated by money because they only had to teach five sections in the old schedule, and in the new schedule, they would now teach six sections, thus eliminating the need for as many FTEs. They had also noticed when colleagues retired they were not replaced. Teacher 6 also stated she would have preferred if district and board representatives would have owned up to the financial aspect of the decision.
making, stating, “That would go miles with a whole bunch of us on the staff to just tell us the truth.” It would have engendered trust where trust was lost.

Parent 5 addressed the teachers’ money theory by saying their evidence did not quite add up; they said:

Well, it was . . . um, there’s no evidence. They’re like, “you know, we used to teach five courses a year and now we do six. So, they’re getting six classes out of us for the price of five.” Yeah, I guess they are, but they’re not necessarily teaching more hours . . . or anecdotal stuff . . . “Oh, people are resigning, they’re not hiring new people, and so they’re just trying to get the most out of all of us.” And so, I mean I can see how someone can do the math and [think], “Yeah, maybe that was an add-on benefit from a financial point of view for the school that we don’t know about.” That could have been considered, but it was never on the table from what I saw or heard.

Parents and teachers disagreed somewhat about the connection between finances and the schedule change. There were advantages for teachers in terms of workload in the new schedule. In the previous schedule, teachers had their full load of students and five courses to teach for the entire school year and only about 50 minutes of preparatory time per day. In the new 4x4 schedule, they would teach a reduced load of students and only three courses at any one time (i.e., three in the fall term and three new ones in the spring term). Teachers might also have smaller class sizes, and their planning period increased to about 90 minutes per day, according to the district-level director. In this parents’ view, all of these factors balanced out and they did not feel finances were one of the district’s underlying motives, but perhaps just a win-win, if the district saved money through improvement programs and opportunities.
District employees categorically denied the claim that the 4x4 schedule was a way for the district to save money. The district-level director explained:

Even on the six-period day, our high school [was] overstaffed. So now in the 4x4, there’s smaller class sizes in certain areas. We’re still overstaffed. So . . . we’re actually spending a little bit more money than what we were spending because we owe teachers’ sections and it’s a different staffing ratio, how you calculate the 1.0 FTE with the 4x4. So it’s not about the financials. And that was said multiple times in our reports . . . we’ll figure out the financials to make whatever schedule work. We want a structure that supports our students and the goals that we wanna achieve. And so the financial piece, it’s not true that it was to save the district money.

Despite the district-level director’s claim the high school was overstaffed and they continued to overspend on salaries even after the change, it is undeniable that the move to the 4x4 created an “efficiency,” because each teacher taught one more section of a class than they had to teach in the old schedule. Efficiency in this case was defined as how to best use the limited financial resources of the district to best meet student needs. Teacher 6 commented the superintendent often used this term “efficiencies” and wanted to create efficiencies. The idea of “finding and creating efficiencies” was indeed a theme present in board meetings, from the superintendent and the deputy superintendent of business services. It was also clear from board meetings that the district was and has continued to be in a budget crisis, so decisions that improved programs for students, while creating efficiency in spending, were a win-win from the district’s perspective. From the teachers’ perspective, the schedule change decision was motivated by money and not by the best interests of students. Teachers had other reasons to mistrust the decision.


*Teachers Felt the Decision Had Not Truly Been Data Driven*

Some of the data the district provided to support the decision were questioned by some teachers from the bell schedule study committee. For example, Teacher 6 said:

> We wanted to have more information than just yes, [they’re eligible], no, [they’re not eligible]. Because there’s a lot of things that can determine whether or not a student meets A–G requirements. Are they planning on going to college . . . or a liberal arts college? So we have two or three kids every year that are in [the arts magnet] that are going to go to X School of Performing Arts. There’s parts of the A–G they don’t need and so they focus their energies in other places. [But the data] was never broken down for us that way.

Teachers wanted to dig even deeper into individual students on the A–G ineligible list to better understand patterns, but administration did not respond to their requests for further data analysis. Moreover, because many students on the ineligible list had the same counselor, teachers inferred this counselor “lacked experience” in counseling and was in part responsible for students’ failure to meet A–G requirement. The committee wanted to get an even more nuanced look at the data, but they did not receive that type of breakdown from administration. Teachers, thus, suspected the decision had not truly been motivated by a look at the data. Teacher 6 commented:

> And it certainly wasn’t data driven other than [the data showing the] A–G [eligibility].

> There wasn’t other data that was looked at. So it concerns me that even if the overall data shows that this isn’t working for most of our kids, it was not going to matter.

Teachers felt the decision was going to be made regardless of what the data said and other solutions—besides a schedule change—had not been sufficiently explored.
Teachers Felt the District Had Not Explored Other Strategies for Improvement

Teachers suggested alternative ways to address the academic struggles and lack of opportunities of some students, including better training for counselors and strengthening the multitiered systems of support (MTSS) process—a process used by schools use to give support to struggling students—rather than a change to the 4x4 schedule. At a board meeting, a teacher leader expressed:

The D/F list at SHS has long been a topic of conversation, but it has yet to be a subject of schoolwide investigation. Since I began at Sherford, I cannot recall a time when our school engaged in a data-driven conversation aimed at solving the problem by implementing new instructional strategies. Even pre-pandemic, I personally have not been observed by a district or site leader for the purpose of improving my instructional practice or supporting struggling students. We have not fully developed nor implemented a clear multitiered system of support for students. We have not created schoolwide systems of supports for students with D/F grades, such as exploring possible inequitable structures at our school, identifying why students are below grade level, nor have we adopted with fidelity many of the established instructional practices aimed at supporting students and increasing college and career readiness. A change in the bell schedule isn’t a magic bullet that will result in schoolwide practices aimed at supporting struggling students without the time and the strategies to drive that change. My peers and I have a wealth of ideas as to how this can be explored schoolwide, but no one has asked us.

This powerful comment by a respected teacher leader revealed many gaps in professional development toward more equitable student outcomes. Engaging in data-driven dialogue and receiving coaching support from administrators were additional strategies teachers suggested
during the revolt to address the academic challenges the school was facing. Teachers also mistrusted leaders’ motivations thinking they were doing it to make themselves look good.

**Teachers Thought the Decision Was Motivated by Ego**

Teachers viewed the decision as a legacy act by different board members. A legacy act is when somebody wants to leave something meaningful or impactful behind after their departure from a group or organization (e.g., a program). One teacher mentioned one board member in particular was overheard bragging the 4x4 decision was her legacy act before leaving the school board. Teacher 6 commented:

[The board member] has been overheard more than once that this was her legacy. I can tell you when she said it, I choose not to communicate with her. She said it in a break during a board meeting . . . at a back to school night, and she’s been overheard saying it at a social event in [the city].

The teacher’s tone suggested the 4x4 schedule was not made in the students’ best interest but might have been more of a selfish, egoic act by the board member.

Several teachers also believed the decision to change schedules was a way for the superintendent to make himself look good by implementing an idea from the previous district where he had worked. Teacher 6 said, “And it just felt like, you know, our superintendent went to this other school for 3 years. And this was the only idea that was brought back.” Teacher 2 felt the same way and believed the superintendent had wanted to implement the 4x4 schedule years prior, as they said, “I feel like it was something that he had proposed or he had floated years before [when he had been a principal here], but there wasn’t really support for it.” The fact that the superintendent seemed to have “brought back” the 4x4 as an idea from his former district
caused mistrust among teachers. Teachers were not the only stakeholders who opposed the schedule. During the revolt phase, a vocal group of parents also rose up against it.

**A Small but Vocal Group of Parents Opposed the Decision**

During the 2020–2021 school year, after the 4x4 schedule had already been voted on but before its potential rescission was brought before the school board, a faction of parents rose up against it. They started protesting with “big signs against the 4x4 on their cars and parking in front of the front office entryway so any parent or student walking in or out would see it,” according to Teacher 3. Additionally, Teacher 4 commented:

> I asked [the assistant principal], “why are people angry?” She shared that people were opposed to [the 4x4], whereas she had come from school districts where that was in place, and we were one of the only schools in Southern California like at the level that we’re at that was not using a 4x4 system and that it’s good for the futures of students, for college readiness, for having more classes. So I was just like, oh, okay, you know, upset parents, they really went to a lot of lengths to show their opinion.

The existence of the vocal group made it seem as though parents were against the schedule, but in reality, most parents were supportive of the change.

**Many Stakeholders Trusted the Rationale Behind the Decision**

Several parents also agreed the change was done for “noble” reasons. Parent 5 expressed great trust in district motivations, stating:

> I think it was done for noble reasons. While there were some teachers who felt it was done for economic reasons, I didn’t really feel that there was enough evidence that that was the reason it was done . . . it was aspirational at its core . . . moving [us] towards best practice for an elite top 10% school, right? Many of the schools in the top 5% are using a
4x4 system . . . This would be better for everybody, better for people who are on IEPs [individualized education plans], better for people who are wanting to go to Harvard, questionable for the people in the middle. But I think it was all good intentions at its core to take [the] high school to even higher heights.

More of the parents I interviewed, in hindsight, expressed a sentiment of trust than did not express trust. Parent 1 also alluded to the superintendent having brought back this idea from the school where he was previously principal, stating:

I think that is the best public school [in the area] academic-wise. And so the idea was, “Oh, yeah, then we need to get that guy and then let’s implement what they have here.”

And knowing also that no bell schedule is perfect . . . but if the community wants academic excellence, then the 4x4 should be the way to go. That was the thinking. Recruiting the principal from the best school in the area to come be a superintendent in the district did not cause mistrust in this parent, but rather they viewed the decision as a good means to implement a schedule that was viewed as superior.

The district-level director further commented:

And there were awful rumors like oh oh [the superintendent] since he went to be a principal at a 4x4 school for 3 years and now this is his thing . . . but really . . . that’s absolutely not true . . . it’s not his thing. 4x4s have been around for years . . . He saw firsthand how students could be afforded opportunities and supported that. So he was favorable to it, for sure, but it’s also a structure that achieves the goals that we wanted. A board member also corroborated the superintendent’s important role in “bringing” the schedule to this district, all in the name of boosting competitiveness, stating:
And also, I think a big part of it was the fact that he had been the principal here and he spent 3 years over there as a principal where they had used something very similar if not identical to what we’re using here now. And [that school] is to me the highest-achieving public school in the County. Obviously, they are doing something that takes them to the top of the list.

The only difference, he suggested, was the 4x4 schedule and the opportunities it afforded. It appears the board at the time also trusted the superintendent’s motive for recommending a change to a 4x4 schedule.

Although most teachers, especially those who had been teaching in the district for a long time, mistrusted the district’s motivations, newer and younger teachers tended to assume positive intent. Teacher 3, who was hired during the 2nd year of implementation, stated, “There must have been a reason for [the change] . . . trusting that process and the reasoning will only help [us] see [the 4x4] in a more positive light because it doesn’t sound like it’s going anywhere.” Overall, more stakeholders have expressed approval 3 years into implementation than those who rose up during the revolt and in the early implementation. Another major theme was the way stakeholders responded to the top-down nature of the reform.

**Challenges and Rationale for the Top-Down Nature of the Decision**

One of the most significant findings of the study was the decision to switch Sherford High School’s schedule to a 4x4 was viewed as top-down by every major group of stakeholders. Although teachers and some parents reacted negatively to this decision-making model, administrators justified it.

Decision making in K–12 schooling contexts is extremely complex. The structure of how decisions are made in the public education space is inherently top-down. Boards have decision-
making power and give directives to superintendents who then give directives to other high-level leaders who give directives to middle managers (i.e., principals) who then decide over staff. In this context, high-level district officials, when asked where the decision came from, often pointed to the board. The district-level director stated, “The board of education of our school board, they basically gave a directive like we want our kids to have opportunities.” Ultimately, it is the board’s decision, but the superintendent has to then designate staff to implement the change.

During the study, school-level administrators recognized the difficulty of leading change processes when top-down directives come to them or when they are forced to gain staff buy-in for a decision they know they are ultimately making top-down. This was exactly what happened to Principal 1 who was charged with leading the staff through a bell schedule study. He said he received a “directive” from the superintendent to lead the schedule reform process, stating:

> And I was told the why [we are making this change]. And I, 100% agreed with the why and I knew it needed to occur. . . . I was both asked to lead the staff through a change process while also receiving a directive. . . . I was one piece of the puzzle. Yes, my title was principal, but I was one piece of the puzzle.

Power dynamics are complex for middle managers, especially school administrators. You have to follow directives from above but to accomplish those directives, it requires leading change processes with staff. Principal 1 expressed pride in the process he led with staff, stating:

> Even though at the end it [the reform] was extremely contentious, extremely political and divisive, I left that process still very proud about the fact that we, not just me, but we, co-union chairs, we ran a process that allowed for significant and many different types of input. I felt really good about the fact that the change process we went through for 14
months or 16 months or however long it was, was a powerful process. Unfortunately, it
didn’t have the powerful impact, meaning they, the school site, [should] have been able
to decide what the new bell schedule was. So the way the process was set up, we,
Sherford High School, were supposed to come to the school board and say this is the bell
schedule we’re proposing. That’s not what happened. It ended up turning around and
being top down.

As he stated, though the collaboration process had been powerful and dynamic, in the
end, all staff input did not matter when the district took over the decision after the board rejected
the seven-period bell schedule that the staff had favored. A board member justified the top-down
nature of the change by explaining the teachers had ample opportunities to give input; the
solution they proposed was not only not radical enough in addressing the problems identified,
but also did not have widespread support from the teachers themselves. He stated:

[The superintendent] even gave [the teachers] the opportunity to come up with their own
answer that would solve these same issues that I mentioned. And it was my
understanding that the teachers did come up with some type of a seven-period bell
schedule that was rejected internally by other teachers. And when it was apparent that the
teachers would not rally around something that they came up with, it became time to
direct the change . . . a decision needed to be made and therefore I was willing to back the
superintendent’s 4x4 schedule.

In his view, the teachers not coming to agreement on a specific proposal and the proposal they
did bring to the table not moving the district in the desired direction (toward more opportunities
for students) were the main impetuses for the process to become top-down.
In interviews with Principal 1, he lamented repeatedly the district took over the decision-making process after failure of the staff committee to come up with a proposal to the board’s satisfaction. He stated the democratic process had “failed,” so the district took the decision into its own hands. One may wonder what are the implications of saying a democratic process had failed to produce the intended results (i.e., a decision to adopt a particular schedule). It implied there was no democracy to begin with, but perhaps for good reason. It appears the district and the teachers were not on the same page about the types of drastic changes the district deemed necessary to advance the agenda of improving student college and career readiness and provide more opportunities for students. The teachers were only willing to go so far, and the district found their solution unacceptable.

The interview with the superintendent suggested the 4x4 schedule was the desired change, even before Principal 1 was asked to engage with his staff. The discourse from the superintendent centered around ideas such as, when presented with all the data on the problem, he was hoping teachers would agree to the 4x4 schedule as the most apt solution. Discourse from the board mirrored the superintendent’s. In particular, the board president at the time referenced listening to the superintendent, believing in his vision, and wanting to implement a 4x4 schedule. This suggested the change to a 4x4 schedule was a foregone conclusion before the process was even underway; rather than set up a process where the staff believed their input could influence the final decision, perhaps the district could have brought parents and staff into the process to gain their support for a decision which was necessary.

When Teachers 1, 2, and 6 were asked about the opportunities they had to contribute to the decision-making process, they explained they believed the district had decided long before the establishment of the bell schedule committee the 4x4 schedule was the way to go. The
discourse of both the superintendent and the board member supported this perspective. In particular, the board member’s account pointed to the superintendent as the main actor in this decision. The board member said:

[The] superintendent thought that the 4x4 would be the way to go. And we studied that . . . and I knew it would be very different from what we had now. But I was willing to take that opportunity . . . I recognized the superintendent is paid to move the district forward. Unless there’s something that I see as absolutely illegal or noncompliant, I’m going to try to move in that direction and try to help him achieve the objectives . . . This was the direction that he wanted to take the district, and I was willing to back him.

Based on this account from the board member, it sounds like the board followed the lead of the superintendent. Teacher 6, who was a participant in the bell schedule study committee and who had an opportunity to give input throughout the process, insisted the decision was top-down, stating, “Those of us that have boots on the ground were not part of the decision, no matter what the district office says.”

To summarize, the decision to switch schedule was brought to the Sherford High School campus as a top-down decision, and though teachers had an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process, the 4x4 schedule was the foregone conclusion of the board and the district office, so these opportunities felt inauthentic to them. The 4x4 schedule was thus imposed upon the staff and the revolt ensued over the following year. Although administrators rationalized top-down decision making, teachers reacted negatively against it.

**Administrators Viewed Top-Down Decisions as Necessary**

Right before implementation of the new schedule, which began during the 2021–2022 academic year, Principal 1 was promoted to another role at the district office and a new principal
was named (i.e., Principal 2). When Principal 2 took over, she stated teachers felt “this was really a very significant top-down decision,” and she added administrators “really try as hard as possible to be collaborative in decision-making, but sometimes there are decisions that are top down [because] it’s in the best interest of our students and their learning.” The superintendent echoed this sentiment, stating:

The perception of top-down is valid. The governing board did want this change. And I had a conversation with three department chairs at Sherford and they were pleading their case, “this is top-down, this is top-down.” And at some point, I had to say to them, there will be times where the governing board directs the work of the school district, when the superintendent directs the work of the school district and when the principal directs the work of the school site. And if they needed to hear that from me, that yes, this feels top down because this is coming from top down.

Sometimes, making top-down decisions is necessary to make important reforms in the education space. The district-level director further stressed all the reasons why the 4x4 schedule offered students much more space in their schedule for acceleration, remediation, and exploring areas of passion without having to choose one course over another. She said, “If we want all these things for our kids, what’s the structure that’s going to support that? And looking at it from that lens, and we’ll get staff there, but we have to ultimately keep focused on really what’s best for students.” The “there” where the staff needed to “get” was acceptance of the 4x4 schedule as the most viable solution to the problem of limited opportunities.

The sentiment among high-level district staff was they had to do this for students, regardless of staff opinions. According to the superintendent, “There would have [never] been

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2 The three staff members alluded to here were the leaders of the Revolt and this was the meeting they had with the superintendent about their concerns.
100% buy-in and consensus from the staff” and he added, “And I say that with love [and] a great deal of respect and admiration. I know many of them and have known them for 18 years.” The superintendent further explained he had seen, first-hand, the damage caused by a former Sherford administrator who had led a schedule change process at the same campus years prior and directed the teachers to vote; the teachers had resented other teachers in the opposing camp and those collegial relationships were damaged for years. He explained:

I believe as difficult as it may be, that it’s the role of the administrator, the governing board, the superintendent, to make informed decisions and then to act and direct. And that if you’re waiting for consensus or a majority vote, you may never reach that. I’m gonna be very candid. [In that moment,] I learned that I would rather have everyone in this room angry with me [the decision maker] than angry with themselves because that’s better for students. Sometimes a directive has to be issued and a decision has to be top-down.

He expressed a sort of wisdom in this statement regarding leaders taking the blame for unpopular decisions rather than allowing staff to be angry at each other. The superintendent further explained when a consensus decision-making process cannot guarantee a desirable result for students quickly enough, then it is time for top-down initiatives. The board felt a sense of urgency, as the superintendent said:

So, there was a sense of urgency [and] that this is a moral imperative. “We need to do this. Why aren’t we doing this?,” “Well, we’re building. The principal has a bell schedule committee. We’re getting buy-in. We’re bringing the voices into the room to have these conversations.” There were members of that governing board that said, “That’s ridiculous. Get it done.”
Indeed, the board member I interviewed expressed exasperation at the idea of consensus, favoring a more top-down, hierarchical leadership model.

Principal 1 questioned whether it might have been better if the decision had come from above from the get-go, stating:

And as much as even I, if I were in the classroom at that time, would have disliked this, maybe top down should have been the way it happened anyways. The reality is we still have a hierarchy, and we are—people, leaders are held responsible for their decisions. And it is their job to make those big decisions.

The evidence pointed to the reform as “top-down” in nature, and although some, especially administrators, agreed it should have been that way, and others reacted negatively to this instance of top-down decision making.

**The Top-Down Nature of the Reform Caused Negative Teacher Feelings**

Top-down decision making works for the people at the top, and not always for teachers and parents. The district-level director recognized this top-down decision-making process caused resentment in the staff and when the board rejected the teachers’ proposal for a seven-period schedule, “the staff probably shifted to like feeling like now it’s being done to [them].” The staff I interviewed reported this same feeling. Teacher 1 said:

To me, they shoved it down our throats. Sorry, I’m going to be frankly honest. And I think . . . the district knew what they wanted all along. The [teacher’s committee] did not endorse the 4x4 at all. To me sometimes, they [the district] form committees so they can say, “oh yeah, we got input from them, but we’re gonna do what we wanna do. We’re not gonna take what they say.”
Although it is clear teachers had an opportunity to provide input on the schedule change, teachers believed the role of the committee was performative and just a way for the district to justify they had gotten staff input before making the decision they wanted all along. In short, teachers believed committees are sometimes just symbols, and the district decides in the end what they are going to do.

Indeed, it seemed as though the 4x4 had been the foregone conclusion desired by the district all along. Questions remained regarding the extent to which Principal 1 at the time understood the 4x4 schedule was the only viable option in the district’s eyes. Teacher 6 believed Principal 1 was intentionally misled by the district and was made to believe he and his staff had truly more say in what their new schedule should look like than they actually did. Teacher 6 further stated:

I think it was a purposeful miscommunication. My dealings with the superintendent and board members is that [they are not trustworthy] . . . that the decision was made long before the process, and that the process was to placate the staff thinking that we had any say.

Teacher 6 believed the teachers’ opinions would not matter, adding she did not trust the superintendent and two board members because she had “caught all three of them in lies, big and small” over the years. Thus, lack of trust was one of the factors that shaped stakeholders’ responses to this reform.

Factors That Shaped Stakeholders’ Responses

Factors that shaped teachers’ response of revolt included (a) teachers’ feelings of resentment and mistrust over not feeling heard, (b) lack of clarity about decision-making models, (c) lack of dialogue around decision making, (d) lack of effective and widespread
communication, I the COVID-19 global pandemic, (f) lack of meaningful professional development for teachers, and (g) lack of support for the superintendent from a group of vocal parents.

**Teachers Felt Unheard and Dismissed, Leading to Feelings of Resentment and Mistrust**

Teachers were in such strong opposition to the decision due not feeling heard by the district on their concerns, which were many. Teacher 1 reported:

> It seemed like we were not listened to. We said [to administration], “Can you show us a school that’s like ours that are same basic demographics with the military and [has successfully implemented a 4x4 schedule]” And [we heard] nothing [back from admin]. You just got no response from what I know. Yeah, I think— the teachers as a whole felt unheard during the process of change.

Teachers felt they did not receive enough communication from administration about how their concerns about the schedule would be addressed. Teacher 2 said:

> My sense was this was something that the board at the time wanted to do and they had convinced themselves that it was the right thing for the school. . . . And so, they asked the teachers what we thought but it didn’t impact their decision, obviously. I don’t want to say for sure it was unanimous, but if not unanimous, then pretty close to it that every single teacher was not in favor of it.

Though teacher resistance to the change was virtually universal, the board did not listen and voted not to rescind their original decision. Teacher 2 explained:

> So just the fact that the decision makers didn’t seem to value [our] input . . . as professional educators doing it on the ground with the students every day. I think we were just dismissed as, “Well, they just don’t want to change. They just don’t want to be
bothered with all of the extra work that’s going to go into doing something different. They don’t want to consider that something different might be better.” I can understand that take, but I don’t think that’s really what it was. There was maybe some of that, but there are genuine reasons why I think this new schedule is not as good for kids . . . it was about what was best for the students ultimately, and that was our input, and it just wasn’t listened to.

Teachers did not feel their input and expertise was valued by decision makers, which led to their resentment. Moreover, teachers did not “fear change,” but rather had legitimate concerns that the schedule would harm kids. Teachers were less concerned about change and more about what was good for kids and that they had not been heard or communicated with adequately.

Not feeling like their voice was heard also led to teacher mistrust. The lead counselor stated when the board did not listen to the teachers’ recommendation, “that was a huge break in the trust system between the teachers and the district office.” The superintendent also stated staff felt they had “had no input [because] their recommendation [for a new bell schedule] was not a 4x4; so they felt that their voice was not honored or respected.” Because the teachers’ recommendation was not ultimately chosen, the superintendent understood teachers had felt disrespected. Principal 2 came in sensing mistrust and anger on the teachers’ part regarding the decision. Principal 2 stated:

I think that the teachers felt like they didn’t have a voice in the decision. 90% did not want this change and felt like their voice didn’t matter. . . . And some of these people who were very vocal about the shift had been in the district for multiple decades and felt like their voice was heard in the past and now were feeling like they just had no voice anymore.
Teachers feeling unheard, especially the veteran teachers, caused a lot of mistrust and other negative emotions among the staff, such as resentment and anger. Teacher indignation was also recognized by the then board president during the April 2021 board meeting when the president stated:

We have had a lot of pushback tonight. Some rightfully so. I apologize again for the whatever miscommunications happened to get us to this point. I feel terrible that you feel so strongly that your words were not listened to. Maybe they were, maybe they weren’t. But we voted to implement the 4x4 a year ago. And at this point in time, either the resistance needs to stop, or you go work somewhere else.

The board president had essentially told them to fall in line or get out. Teachers felt extremely disrespected and devalued by this statement, so much so that another board member at the May 2021 meeting addressed the “culture of toxicity” in the district by stating:

And the divisive, condescending tone and bullying from the top down is a problem. I have seen toxic workplaces, and I am very concerned about how people are being treated. And if [our board] president isn’t going to apologize to you, then I will. Because I sit up here too, and I have to hold him accountable for talking to us all that way. And it’s not acceptable.

The words of the board president no doubt caused harm and further exacerbated the teachers’ negative feelings about the decision. One key factor that contributed to all these negative feelings was the lack of clarity about decision-making models.

**Lack of Clarity About Decision-Making Models Complicated the Decision-Making Process**

The district-level director pointed to an unclear decision-making model as part of what complicated the decision. According to her, there was no established decision-making model, so
it was unclear what the role of the teacher committee truly was, and what the role of teacher input would be. Because it seemed like the district had already learned a great deal about and was leaning to adopting a 4x4 schedule prior to the existence of the teachers’ committee, it was unclear what role the committee should play. Further, it seemed as though the teacher’s learning and sense-making in the committee was not congruent with the learning the district had done and was doing about the kind of schedule structure that would be truly transformative. The superintendent alluded to his staff and representatives from the board visiting other 4x4 schools in the county and looking at data about achievement in those schools, then passing that information along to Principal 1 for his committee and reporting it in the board meetings. It seemed the district’s hope was for the committee to provide learning and buy-in into a shift to a 4x4, or other similar structure, which would provide lots more opportunities for students.

It is unclear the extent to which Principal 1 passed information along to the teachers in the committee about the 4x4 and the learning that was happening at the district level. When I asked the superintendent whether he thought the committee had learned as much about the 4x4 as other district employees, he said:

So, I don’t know that they were doing that to the extent. I wasn’t in those meetings, unfortunately. When I had opportunities to review agendas and to look at that, I believed they understood the driving why, what are we trying to accomplish and achieve. And they were looking at different types and models of bell schedules, including 4x4 that could help to address those three driving forces. I don’t know to the extent in which those conversations were specific to the 4x4.
All signs pointed to the idea that the district learning did not match the teachers’ learning. When I asked one of the teachers who had been on the committee whether they spent time discussing the 4x4 as an option and learning about it, Teacher 6 said:

It didn’t come up in the committee. The committee never discussed it. We discussed it as an option [during] a full staff meeting. And literally in that meeting, people were like, no [to the 4x4]. And I can picture the principal walking over to that [4x4] poster and pulling it off the wall and throwing it on the ground.

Principal 1’s action of throwing the 4x4 option down to the ground, corroborated by the leader of the teachers revolt during the April 2021 board meeting, made the teachers believe the 4x4 was no longer on the table. Even Principal 1 was confused about the role of the committee and the extent to which the committee would actually have decision-making power. That probably led to Principal 1 acting as though the teachers had some say in the matter—and he may have believed they did—and not appropriately managing teachers’ expectations throughout the process.

When the teachers found out a schedule option they had explicitly rejected had been passed, this created a lot of disappointment and conflict. The district-level director explained:

It definitely wasn’t the ideal process, in my opinion, to make this type of change. Other schools I have worked in have followed a consensus process with staff. While Sherford did have a committee, there was no established decision-making or consensus process for determining the new format of the bell schedule. The top-down directives is one of the unique factors that we faced. Even though, for example, in another district, the board did direct sites to either adopt a trimester or 4x4, the consensus as to which of the two to adopt, was driven by the staff and admin through a process. Here, the directive came too
late, as the teachers had from the beginning not even looked at giving a 4x4 or trimester a chance for research, thus when the directive came, things became very muddy, very quickly.

The decision-making process to switch to a new schedule in a neighboring district, as described by the district-level director, made it very clear the parameters in that district were to either switch to a 4x4 or a trimester schedule, with no space for anything outside of that; but teachers and principals had full power to switch to either one or the other following a consensus model. The illusion of choice was there, and hence, that led to more buy-in. That seemed like a more “desirable” process than to think that one has a choice only to be told 2 years later that the choice they supported was not the desired choice.

**Teachers’ Emotions and Resistance**

Another major theme that emerged during the initial stages of implementation was teachers’ struggles in adapting to the new 4x4 schedule. A teacher with a leadership role commented:

One of the teachers that I spoke to initially [was] just in tears . . . The amount [of] having to do things differently than they had been doing them, felt scary without having these colleagues [who had just resigned]. And so I think there was just like a meltdown of, “I don’t wanna do this.” Again, I think the rollout of [the schedule] was terrible. I think if you tell someone, do this, do this, and there’s some underlying guiding principle here that we disagree . . . there was a lot of digging your heels in.

Teachers were not in a good place, emotionally speaking, when this transition began. They were in tears over colleagues who had resigned and given they had opposed the decision, they showed high levels of resistance to making the necessary curriculum changes. The teacher
with a leadership role explained, “I was surprised to hear language like, we’re just going to do 2
days of work in 1 day” and attributed teachers’ resistance to both a lack of teacher will in that
initial transition and a lack of understanding about what was expected. Teachers felt shocked
about the change and did not want to determine essential standards and cut and reshape content
accordingly, rather than just compress two old 55-minute lessons into one new 90-minute day.
Having felt so burned by how the decision came about, perhaps the teachers simply were not
willing to do what was necessary in the new schedule. The teacher with a leadership role also
believed teachers were unclear as to how to modify their instruction, which pointed to a lack of
sufficient professional development support. She stated:

    Is there really not an understanding that doing a 4x4 does actually mean that you
adjust content? You can mask that any way you want, but if you’re trying to do as much
content as you were doing before, I think that’s unfair to students and pointless to this
whole schedule. The idea behind a 4x4, I think, is deeper learning. And that message, I
don’t think, was sent when this was being adopted at all. And I think that—and it still
clearly doesn’t live. And that’s something that I guess I think is still on the table is this
real misunderstanding of what’s supposed to be happening.

It seemed school leaders did not adequately shape teachers’ expectations for how instruction
should change.

**Teachers Did Not Feel Supported Via Professional Development**

    In addition, several participants felt there was a lack of meaningful professional
development support for the transition. During the May 2021 board meeting, one trustee
commented the support offered to the teachers “has been insufficient in their minds” because the
“resource folder was incomplete.” Although they were encouraged to speak with other teachers
from other 4x4 schools, “it was via a Zoom session and it was in the middle of a pandemic,” suggesting such support was not enough for a seamless transition. When asked about what kinds of professional development the teachers received, Teacher 6 expressed:

What PD [professional development]? Is the answer to that. We were given lots of links and told, “well, if you wanna go visit a school, you do this.” We were trying to like cobble things together while we were doing the schedule. And I know the Department of Learning says over and over again, “but you were given PD.” No, you threw cash at us to redo our pacing guides. That’s not, that is not PD. If I have to do it all by myself like this, pulling things out of the air, you’re not developing me in any way . . . there was no guided professional development about how to pace things, how to rewrite assessments, how to differentiate instruction for 90 minutes every single day.

Though teachers were paid a few additional hours to plan and redevelop their curriculum maps during the summer, this time and money could not replace meaningful professional development. Upon evaluating these curriculum maps, the teacher with a leadership role stated not everyone did them, and “they’re not great, and of course, they’re not” because there were not sufficient supports to teach teachers how to build these maps. The teacher with a leadership role further characterized the professional development supports given to teachers felt reactionary and not part of a deliberate professional development plan, stating:

I looked through the stuff that the district gave them, and . . . it felt like everything that had been done was a check-off box, right. In general, we seem to be a reactionary district. So like, what do you want. And then let me give you that, right . . . So, teachers at said [to the district], “you want me to do these maps, I need examples.” So, then they throw a ton of stuff into a drive with examples from other schools. [But] there wasn’t really a
discussion, there wasn’t like a coming together to examine them, what do these do well, what would we do differently, what do you see, like what resonates with you, like whatever, right?

District documents showing the supports offered to teachers provide further evidence of this “check-off” culture. Figure 7 illustrates the different supports provided.

Figure 7
Supports Provided During the 4x4 Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Transition Support &amp; Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Teachers</td>
<td>4x4 Resource Folder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDOE Essential Learning Series: June 21-25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDOE English Dearth Learning Series: August 3-4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Checklists and resources for pacing guidance/alignment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close expectations and timelines for delivering markers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School activities calendar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classifying period-to-period</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Math/Science/Block</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>GC Planning Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visit CCA AP Bio teacher and NH teacher in the fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District Documents showing the supports offered to teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 7 illustrates the different supports provided.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note. The document has been modified to change the initials of the school to its pseudonym, SHS.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>AP Planning Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration with other department teachers and co-teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department release day</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AP by the Sea: AP Lit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentorship: Curriculum Rehab</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Languages</td>
<td>AP by the Sea: AP Art and Design</td>
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<tr>
<th>PENNBTC</th>
<th>AP Planning Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visit another school site and collaborate with their teachers (8/22/21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/Social Science</td>
<td>Review new textbooks for US History and World History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>AP Planning Time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>AP by the Sea: AP Calculus BC</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CPM Virtual Professional Learning – Summer 2021</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CPM Sample Posting Codes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>AP by the Sea: AP Planning Time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visit another school site and observe classes and collaborations (5/21)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule a collaboration meeting prior to the start of the school year for math/science teachers to meet with PE teachers to gain insights into their subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math Support for breaking up the periods</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Breakup periods into organized activities (e.g., workability known in a study Skills class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Resource/Information</td>
<td>Create Parent Guides</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDIS Best Practice Document</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wednesday Professional Learning Meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MTHS Academic (Thea Main)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MTHS Social Emotional &amp; Behavioral Issues Committee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff Survey – 3 months – November 2021</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SDIS Principal Staff Survey – February 2022</td>
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It seemed like most of the support came in the form of resources and paid planning time and teachers were expected to know what to do. There were several trainings and coaching opportunities listed in the supports document, but these opportunities were likely taken by teachers who were already interested in growing their practice and who did not resist the new schedule as much. For example, one professional learning session leading up to implementation discussed different block teaching models, but there was no evidence of further dialogue and collaboration around this new knowledge teachers were supposed to implement to reshape their instruction for a 90-minute block. The superintendent also felt some teachers’ willingness to engage in professional development was impacted by their feelings of not being heard and their veteran status, thinking of themselves as experts, and the change would not be better than what they were already doing. He said:

It was evident to me that there were some [teachers] receptive to learning new pacing guides, new instructional strategies, new ways to assess learning, and that there were some that said, “I’m not sold on this. You can’t convince me that this is better than what I’ve been doing for 15 years.” And that comes down to buy-in [about the decision].

Furthermore, the teacher with a leadership role felt “this school didn’t have a coaching culture to begin with” and described several barriers she identified, such as teams with no clear instructional leadership purpose because they were mostly informational in nature. She stated, “The fact that there’s always so many things that we have to get through in the [interdepartmental leadership team] agenda for the department meeting [that] it feels like a business meeting,” and constrains the empowerment of the teacher leaders of each department to actually bring about instructional improvement during department meetings. Department meetings then became about “covering” the required agenda, though some departments were
starting to recognize the importance of reading the information in advance to allow for more time for discussion. Another barrier the teacher with a leadership role identified in the creation of a coaching culture in benefit of teachers was the instructional leaders themselves did not have anyone to coach them, stating:

There’s no coaching culture here. And I think that’s district wide, not just at this school.

So my experience is no one here is getting coaching. So, like the principals aren’t being coached. They’re very on their own, right? I think that people see coaching as a negative, right. Like as something that you get when you’re not succeeding. If you only see coaching as like something where because someone’s about to get fired, they get a coach, right, or something like that.

If receiving coaching is viewed from a fixed mindset of “something is wrong with someone,” then teachers are unlikely to opt into this kind of support, leaving the potential support that a skilled instructional coach can provide totally unexplored.

Though an instructional coach was hired to support teachers through the transition, it seemed as though the lack of a coaching culture in the school interfered with the coach’s influence on instruction. Moreover, beyond the evaluation processes teachers engaged in, which was limited in scope to a one or two observations of their teaching each year, there was no specific structure to provide coaching support to all teachers. There was no clear, schoolwide expectation that teachers should grow, and, as reported by the teacher with a leadership role, there seemed to be little to no coaching support offered to school-level administrators.

The structures for professional learning and collaboration expanded since the schedule implementation. For instance, a teacher with a leadership role reported the MTSS committee experienced professional development and discussion with the instructional coach during the 1st
year of implementation of the 4x4, and, as a result of this “experiment,” the professional learning community (PLC) structure was “born.” The teacher with a leadership role stated:

Like there’s this slow building of what does professional development look like here.
And that team like had some real aha moments in talking about, and there were like five people and then talking about what they had learned, right. From each other and going out and trying things and it was energetic. And the Principal was a part of it. And I think that—and then because of that sort of magic that happened in that group, that’s what created our design for this year. So not the content, but the design of having these cross-curricular groups and calling it a PLC.

These interdisciplinary PLCs attempted to promote collaboration and were put in place the 2nd year of implementation of the new schedule. This structure created a space for all teachers about once a month to organize in teams and discuss best practices in integrating more student talk into their lessons. Another factor that constrained stakeholders’ responses was insufficient communication.

**Communication About the Why Behind the Decision Could Have Been Better**

Another major criticism of the decision-making process from several stakeholders was the communication aspect. One of the parent members of the board’s Spring 2023 4x4 subcommittee, Parent 1, explained:

So the superintendent came [to the board’s Spring 2023 subcommittee on the 4x4 and] made a presentation about why it was implemented and a little bit about the history. What was mind boggling to me is that the 4x4 was implemented for [specific] reasons or goals. And nobody’s really aware of those ones. The superintendent knows . . . but it’s not that there is a dashboard somewhere that’s saying, “Oh, we wanted to do this.”
Parent 2, who was present in the superintendent’s same presentation, stated these reasons were “never communicated very well . . . you know, [they] didn’t really message it well.” Parent 1 added there was no easy way for parents and the community to see school achievement data and track it over time and recommended “that this data be readily available” via an easy to read, transparent dashboard where parents can learn about A–G graduation rates and other statistics.

Not only was the “why” behind the decision not widely known, but also some parents did not see the need to change the schedule because, in their eyes, the school was performing highly already. Parent 2 said, “Smart kids have always come out of the school; I guess I didn’t understand why did we have to force this schedule when we were already producing really smart kids?” With more communication around the academic challenges, perhaps more parents would have understood the impetus for the change.

Parent 3 recalled hearing the rationale for the 4x4 at a school board meeting, “but it didn’t seem like it ever got repeated in the newspapers or with the letters.” They said, “But it made good sense to me, so I kind of filed that away.” The fact the message was stated in board meetings but not repeated in the papers made it hard for the community at large to remember the rationale. In June 2021, the local newspaper printed a letter from the superintendent in which he explained the rationale behind the 4x4 decision, but that was over 1 year after the decision had been made and just 1 month after the board had also voted to uphold it. For a message to stick, the more often it is repeated, the better. Parent 3 also felt, based on her interactions with some of the counselors, the staff probably was not fully informed on the why either. She said, “When you change something, you need to make your whole staff know why. You have to allow time for them to buy into it, sort it out.”
There was also a subset of parents who felt the decision was not properly advertised in board meeting agendas, leading to fewer parents getting involved. Parent 2 stated:

It was a little misleading “bell schedule” and like when I see a bell schedule on a newsletter that’s not alarming to me. A bell schedule is like we have a pep rally bell schedule today. It’s not. I feel like the 4x4 is a curriculum change . . . you’re compressing this curriculum to a crazy pace . . . but so that sort of was a little bit of a miscommunication.

These parents felt communication about the decision was misleading because “bell schedule change” does not encapsulate everything the 4x4 represented in terms of a change in curriculum. Other parents, however, did not report feeling blindsided by the decision. Parent 4 said, “I mean as far as I can remember, they did get everybody involved; there were huge discussions, [polls, and community forums] from the beginning. It wasn’t something that they just came up with [on] a whim, you know.” A former board member echoed those sentiments at the May 2021 board meeting, stating, “There was an awful lot of discussion and meetings on that [for the past 3 years] . . . so when I hear people say, ‘gee, I didn’t know this was going on, personally I’m saying, golly, where were you?’”

The superintendent agreed communication about the why could have been better, but he did not feel like people should have felt so blindsided, stating:

Hindsight is 2020. The district absolutely could have done a better job in promoting the why and advertising the why . . . communications could have been more frequent. They could have reached different channels, different shareholder groups. There were opportunities for involvement and discussion. Was it enough? It depends who you ask. Did the pandemic disrupt and interrupt? Are letters to the local paper effective methods
of communication? Communication is never perfect. And there are always opportunities after the fact to look back and say, we could have, or we should have done X, Y, or Z. Could there have been more? Yes, absolutely. Did we hide this as a big secret? And then one day people woke up and here it is? Absolutely not, something in the middle.

There were channels where the information was shared, such as board meetings, but perhaps the stakeholders who felt blindsided were not looking into those channels, especially given the tumultuous time in which the decision was happening. The COVID-19 global pandemic no doubt played a role in complicating the decision-making process.

The COVID-19 Global Pandemic Was a “Perfect Storm” That Complicated the Decision-Making Process

One of the major factors that led to stakeholders feeling blindsided and concerned about the decision was the decision was made during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The lead counselor reported she heard rumors the board had done “this vote like on a random board meeting during COVID, so [the teachers felt they] didn’t have the time to combat.” There was also a general perception from teachers that teachers did not have enough input in the decision due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Teacher 4 stated:

But the way that it got voted, not that it was voted in secret, but there one of the complaints was “whoa whoa whoa whoa, we didn’t have any input on this.” However, I do know that the current administrator at that time did hold a lot of info sessions for teachers and community members to participate in, but it was during COVID . . . it got pushed through during a crazy time and without like a normal process of which a decision like that would be voted on.
The opportunity for teachers to give input was provided for almost 2 years prior to the pandemic, but the revolt happened during the 1st year of the pandemic, so some teachers felt they had no opportunities for input. For many teachers, it felt like the 4x4 had been pushed through during the pandemic. Teacher 3 stated, “The voting or the change happen[ing] right during COVID and so coming back for the first time in person [to implement the schedule] and after COVID was kind of like a double whammy.” Teacher 3 felt it was probably asking a lot of the teachers to make so many shifts in a short span of time, though she, personally, was not as affected by the change.

Teacher 6 commented she was not surprised about the board’s timing on the decision. She said, “Just another day in Sherford. In the past, there have been decisions made at inconvenient times for the rest of us to go to the board meeting.” Some parents also felt blindsided by the decision due to being overwhelmed by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Parent 2 stated:

Like, are we going to be in class? Is the world exploding? What are we doing? And then all of a sudden, this [decision] came through. And I just remember everyone was just blindsided. And again, whether that was us sort of focusing on COVID, and we had not necessarily been focusing on this other topic.

Parents also largely believed it was not a good time to make a major change. Parent 2 said, “The implementation right as we were getting over COVID was odd in that there didn’t seem to be a compelling reason to have to do it then . . . we were real puzzled why anybody thought making another big change was a good idea.” Parent 4 also agreed the timing of the decision during the pandemic was not good, stating, “And it was a little bit chaotic and with the
zoom meetings and everything.” Parent 3 also thought the pandemic was not a wise time to implement a change, as they said:

The pandemic [was] not a good time to make a change ‘cause the teachers were already all struggling . . . And [with kids] trying to learn on Zoom at home, and it was a terrible time . . . to make major structural changes when everybody’s already totally overstressed . . . when you have a change that’s made during a time that everybody’s already feeling great stress, the stress is just going to get attached to the change. And there’s no time to leisurely explain it and get buy in. And so often people will reject something that they didn’t participate in . . . it seems to me that the decision and the implementation were flawed.

The timing of the decision was not good in general due to people’s stress during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which probably exacerbated their negative feelings toward the decision. One may wonder why the district did not wait until after the pandemic to implement. Teacher 2 explained:

So, I think their position was like, “Well, we didn’t plan it this way, but this is actually like perfect preparation because now you’re planning for longer periods and this is what your schedule has been this year, then whatever our schedule looks like next year, if we’re back in person, is going to be some major change. You’re going to have to adjust from what we’re doing now to what we’re doing in the fall, so why not just adjust to this?”

Indeed, the schedule the school had adopted for distance learning was already a form of a block schedule, so teachers were having to plan for longer blocks and determine essential learnings that had to be delivered live via Zoom versus those smaller content pieces the students could study
asynchronously. This, in school and district administrators’ eyes, had already partially prepared them for a shift to the 4x4 schedule, according to the superintendent’s comments during the February 2021 board meeting. Teachers did not agree with the board’s decision or rationale to implement the change in the middle of the pandemic rather than waiting. The superintendent understood choosing not to delay implementation “was not well received by the entire staff.”

Parent 3, who also thought the timing was not good, understood the administration’s perspective, by stating, “On the other hand, perhaps the administration felt, well, everything has changed anyway. Why not just change it?” However, the teachers wanted to delay so they would have more time to prepare to successfully teach in the 4x4, according to a teacher’s comment at the May 2021 board meeting:

[Speaking about a slide that lists the plan of supports for teachers] This is what we were supposed to get. This is what was supposed to be our plan to plan this year. And yes, the pandemic happened. But that cannot be both the reason and the excuse for not supporting us now. [You are] requiring teachers to build the plane while we’re flying it . . . with no strategies, no supports, no pedagogical methods, and also learn about it at the same time. But I need all of that before we start. And we deserved that before we started, which is why we’re here tonight imploring you to delay.

The teachers felt they had not received appropriate professional development support for this transition. In hindsight, Teacher 2 said that it would have been difficult to prepare for something they have never experienced. He stated, “Until you’re in it I don’t know that there’s a way you can really prepare or I can’t necessarily think of specific [things] like ‘if only they had given me this or if only I had done this, it would have been easier.’” In addition to making the official decision near the beginning of the COVID-19 global pandemic in May 2020, many other
happenings in the district created controversy in the year that followed and lack of support for the superintendent from a particular subset of parents.

**Lack of Support for the Superintendent From a Group of Parents**

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, a faction of parents surfaced against the superintendent. This faction was described as “seagulls” by Parent 1, who said, “They come, make a lot of noise, poop on everything . . . they leave a mess and then they fly away again . . . and then the next day they’re there again . . . about something else.” Another parent further characterized them as “the culture warriors.” Parent 5 said:

> There’s culture warrior parents . . . any chance they have to take a shot at the school and the district . . . they’re gonna use anything whether it’s [controversial incidents], whether it’s CRT [critical race theory], whether it’s books in the library, whether it’s 4x4, that whatever blunt instrument they can get to whack over the school direct district with it they’re gonna do that . . . that was the most vocal group. . . . Those people came from a national movement, Steve Bannon, said it, “the secret to picking the lock is through school boards.” And we need to go and take over school boards across the country. And they got money and resources and how to, tool kits on how to do that. And next thing you know, they’re all showing up at school board meetings.

Both parents described this group of parents as very vocal about district issues. Parent 5 further explained the ultimate aim of this culture war is to push a right-wing Christian agenda on schooling, privatize education, and defund and destroy the public school system.

This group got involved in several issues that occurred during this time period, exacerbating the issues and making them even more controversial than they were originally. One parent reported controversies over hybrid learning, a district equity committee, and an incident at
an athletic event that went viral nationwide and had ramifications for the district. Parent 5 stated, “So there was a lot of bigger dramatic stuff happening generally in my view that superseded almost the 4x4 change,” explaining why perhaps some people did not pay attention to it. These parents who had been unaware of the decision when it was made blamed the superintendent and wanted to hold him responsible for the decision. As Parent 1 explained, people asked themselves, “who made this decision,” but there is not one single person you can blame for decision making. In reality, the decision was very complex. Parent 1 stated:

We will never know. We will probably never know who decided to implement the 4x4.

We don’t know what happens when the superintendent is with the board member in his office. He could say “well this board told me this and then another board told me that.”

It’s unfortunate that people don’t understand how that mechanism works.

Some community members believed in holding someone accountable for decisions that were unpopular and wanted the superintendent fired for making this decision, which showed the public was not clear on how decisions and power flowed in school districts. Moreover, as Parent 1 stated, “They’re looking for someone to blame, they’re looking for quick fixes but if you blame [or make things personal], that doesn’t solve anything.”

Parent 3 also alluded to the subset of parents who “seemed particularly interested in blaming the superintendent,” and who felt the schedule was not good for kids and should not be implemented without teacher support. This parent characterized this subset of parents as the “same names” who opposed other district initiatives (e.g., the equity committee, the No Place for Hate Club, support for LGBTQ+ rights) and responses (e.g., the district’s condemning response to an athletic incident that was perceived as racist by virtually everyone outside the district) and who also wanted to fire the superintendent over those. These were the parents who “were already
upset with the school,” according to Parent 3, “cause their kids weren’t in school. They didn’t want masks, they didn’t want vaccines . . . so they’re already angry . . . 4x4 happens. Okay, the 4x4 is something to be angry about.” Parent 3 further shared this group publicly stated their goal was to get the superintendent fired due to his support of initiatives they opposed, such as masks. According to Parent 3, they made their intentions clear in letters to the local newspaper and on their website, which has since been taken down as it received a lot of criticism over the promotion of bigoted ideas and support for the January 6, 2021 insurrection in the United States.

The superintendent was very much aware of the existence of this group, stating:

Some of the individuals in that group, some of the initiatives that we have championed or some of the decisions that we have made, I will stand behind and disagree with their position on those.

The superintendent recognized dealing with community resistance is an “occupational hazard.” Parent 3 concluded the rollout of the new schedule was complicated by resistance from this parent group, stating:

I couldn’t tell if it [the 4x4] was being used as an issue to attack the superintendent, or if it’s a genuine issue or a mixture . . . that that faction in the community took what I think was a flawed roll out and made it worse . . . I do think institutionally that having this political faction made it much more difficult for the community to think rationally about the 4x4, which is a shame.

Ultimately, a small group of parents contributed to the politicization of the decision and benefited from the “flawed” decision making to advance their agenda, including timing of the decision (i.e., during the COVID-19 global pandemic, a time of high stress), the perceived lack of communication about the why, and the fact that the teachers were all virtually against it,
according to Parent 3. These parents were unsuccessful in having the superintendent fired, but later resurfaced lobbying the newly elected board members in January 2023 to create a citizens’ committee to evaluate the 4x4 schedule. The committee formed, composed of people with very different levels of support for the 4x4 schedule.

Parent members of this 4x4 evaluation committee, as a result of engaging with people with divergent opinions, reflected in the importance of dialogue. Parent 1 spoke to this faction of parents as a reflection of the polarization of society at large and added, “What never works is cancel[ing] or ignor[ing] a part of the community. It doesn’t really matter how much we differ [in our] opinions. If we don’t try to work together, we’ll never work [things] out.” This parent spoke to the importance of dialogue in an increasingly polarized society and community and further recognized how difficult it is when the opinions are so diametrically opposed. Having been able to engage in dialogue with some members of this faction, Parent 1 felt dialogue brings everyone in the community closer together, stating:

What I did learn though is that being in those meetings with people I truly do not agree with, that I now see that a lot of what I do not agree with is just not it’s not it’s not necessarily their opinion but it’s also a bad choice of words. They are nervous. Now talking to those people I do think that I’m closer to everybody. The people who are considered complainers, I learned that most of them just care about the kids just like I do and have the same intention as I do. It’s just that the approach is a little different. . . . And you actually talk to people one on one and when you take the time, you often find out that you agree and you come closer to a certain solution.

It seemed that as a result of the committee that formed to evaluate the 4x4, some parents felt they were able to dialogue with others who had very different opinions and came to
understand and appreciate them more. The space the committee created for authentic dialogue was no doubt a testament to the important role dialogue can play in school reform.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to dissect a school reform that became highly contentious to gain lessons about how leaders can gain support from all stakeholders as they implement important changes. As shown during the 4x4 schedule transition at Sherford High School, it was a long and complex process that ultimately turned into a sour power struggle between district administrators and employees on the ground—teachers—and a subset of particularly vocal parents. A decision that had been 3 years in the making was resisted and eventually implemented, even without the support of most of the teachers.

Three years into the implementation, hard feelings remained among some staff, but most began to accept and adjust to the new bell schedule. Future studies should analyze the impact of the schedule I the desired outcomes and stakeholders’ perceptions about these impacts on student outcomes. After learning about how the reform was framed and identifying four distinct phases (i.e., problem finding, stakeholder input, revolt and preparation, and implementation and evaluation), I described what motivated this reform decision and stakeholders’ varied responses throughout the decision-making process and the factors that influenced their responses. The next chapter addresses the implications of this 4x4 bell schedule change for understanding of reform in schools more generally.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the lessons learned from a study of one school change effort. I explain the implications of my analysis for a technical change that was largely absent of cultural change needed for its acceptance and success. This study showed how certain factors such as (a) making clear to all stakeholders why a reform decision is necessary, (b) taking important steps to gain teacher buy-in during the decision-making process, (c) communicating clearly and transparently to maintain trust, and (d) providing adequate and ongoing professional development were routinely missing. As educational leaders attempted to adopt and implement a schedule change at Sherford High School, the absence of these factors led to a revolt and threatened to derail or undermine the whole reform.

I discuss the lessons learned from the main themes that emerged in relation to the research questions. First, I talk about the rationale for changing a school schedule and discuss the reasons why the transition at Sherford High School became flawed; I finish with an analysis of some of the lessons learned regarding school reform more generally.

**Rationale for Changing a School Schedule**

A review of the literature review indicated schedule changes have become a very important structural reform because “a well-developed schedule provides opportunities for student needs to be met, whether those needs are to recover credit, to pursue a career interest, or to experience a curriculum that challenges high achievers” (Merenbloom & Kalina, 2013, p. 49). In the case of the school in this study, the main reasons that drove the district to change the schedule were to:

- Improve college and career readiness and academic outcomes,
- Improve career readiness and expand coursework,
- Provide more equitable access to opportunities,
- Align with vision and compete with similar high schools in the area,
- Initiate a call from parents to create more opportunities for students, and
- Ensure the district was in compliance with instructional minutes.

Indeed, the old six-period year-long schedule was limited in providing students opportunities, and, in particular, allowing all students to access a college-preparation course of study. Moreover, the district identified some equity issues so a change in the schedule was thought to bring more opportunities to all people and was seen as a key strategy to improve student outcomes. Previous researchers have claimed certain scheduling models are more beneficial than others in supporting a wide variety of student needs. However, studies conducted on the effects of innovative schedules on student achievement (e.g., Bair & Bair, 2010; Childers, 2018; Comer, 2012; Jackson, 2013; Nogler, 2017; Parks, 2013), to date, have found no strong evidence to suggest changing a schedule improves learning (Hanover Research, 2014; Mizhquiri, 2019; Queen, 2008; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006).

In the case of Sherford High School, an already high-performing school with fairly high graduation rates and advanced placement (AP) scores, it remains unclear to what extent the schedule change will improve student learning, given only 2 full years had elapsed since the beginning of implementation at the time of this study. Although the literature in general on schedule change has shown mixed or ill-defined results about the impact they have on student achievement, the Sherford School District went through with efforts to reform anyway. The four-by-four (4x4) schedule transition at Sherford High School was thought to be a good idea to
increase college and career readiness, provide more space for different types of courses for students, and mitigate what had been a clear equity gap in access to opportunities.

**A Flawed Reform Effort**

This schedule change was an example of educational reform and the challenges that can come with it. Like previous research has shown, structural reform by itself in the K–12 U.S. educational system, though common, has often been inadequate to affect school change (Cuban, 2013, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Guskey, 2002). Structural reforms, such as schedule changes, tend to be technical solutions unlikely to address the cultural change often needed to affect change. Because many structural reforms are “technical” in nature, they often do not do enough to disrupt the “grammar of schooling,” a condition in schools that has not evolved much in the past several decades and often pushes against new ideas of doing school (Hubbard & Datnow, 2020; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Moreover, the success of any significant structural change rests on the shoulders of teachers, as they are called to teach under a new arrangement (Cerit, 2013; Correnti & Rowan, 2007; Rowan & Miller, 2007). Such change efforts are often challenged by teachers’ beliefs (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016), a lack of teacher self-efficacy (Cerit, 2013), and a lack of adequate support from school leaders (Stewart et al., 2012). Therefore, structural reform alone without cultural reform may not yield the intended results. Cultural reform must accompany structural reform, and this cultural reform must act upon the culture of learning of everyone in schools.

This study of the 4x4 schedule change at Sherford High School showed the ways in which a lack of effective communication regarding the reasons behind the change, an inadequate dialogue with stakeholders that could have helped gain their approval, and an insufficient teacher professional development plan to increase teachers’ capacity to implement the reform left the
culture of the school largely unattended. In other words, teachers’ and community beliefs about the reform were not sufficiently addressed. As a result, the reform process involved a revolt from teachers and parents, and the reform was almost derailed.

Many factors contributed to a flawed implementation of the 4x4 schedule at Sherford High School, including a top-down decision-making process, lack of clear communication about the why, and lack of meaningful professional development support. Another important piece in the change management process that the district was not able to do was build a powerful coalition (Kotter et al., 2021) in support of the 4x4 schedule that would have led a significant cultural change. They also were unsuccessful at creating a volunteer army (Kotter et al., 2021), without which, it is questionable if meaningful change will appear in the short term.

Top-Down Decision Making

Most of the research on educational reform has pointed to the necessity of collaboration and full stakeholder buy-in throughout the adoption and implementation phases. In the case of Sherford School District, it was very clear that stakeholder buy-in and approval of the new schedule was not obtained. Instead of securing buy-in, the decision was ultimately imposed in a top-down manner by the board and district leaders to, in essence, make the adoption of the 4x4 schedule a “foregone conclusion.”

In K–12 educational contexts, change is often imposed on teachers. Yet, as Freire (2000) pointed out, dialogue is central to any transformation effort, and decisions to change schedules is not an exception. As this study showed, the absence of a true creative dialogue with all relevant stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, educators, school leaders, and anyone else affiliated with the particular school) resulted in resistance and lack of trust. A truly dialogic decision-making process can take time and can be extremely delicate. When reforms are imposed as top-down
decisions without including teachers in the decision-making process nor the design of the implementation of the reform, successful enactment of the reform is made difficult because teachers’ beliefs about the reform need to shift so their practices can shift (Zhang & Liu, 2014). In the case of Sherford School District, the top-down nature of the reform created a great deal of teacher resistance.

Bridich (2016) pointed out to accomplish approval of a new schedule, school leadership must engage all stakeholders in an open-ended, creative dialogue, but such a dialogue may “challenge the traditional hierarchical school” (p. 12) because it values the voices of those without formal power. In the case of Sherford School District, stakeholders contested the decision and felt they had not been involved enough with it. When the decision passed in May 2020, many parents and teachers were unaware of its passing. Teachers had also felt their voices had been ignored. Although there were opportunities for teachers to get involved via a schedule study committee prior to the decision, these opportunities later seemed “inauthentic” as teachers later learned a schedule model they had explicitly rejected (i.e., the 4x4 schedule) was the one favored by district leaders. They saw the decision as a top-down action and many teachers felt unheard.

As previous research has pointed out, successfully enacting a new schedule is unlikely to occur under conditions of mistrust between teachers and school leaders (Liu et al., 2016). Although a committee was formed at Sherford High School to study data on student achievement and different schedule models, there was little clarity about what the role of the committee’s feedback would be. Teachers were angry when their recommendation for a seven-period schedule was rejected and the 4x4 schedule was adopted instead. Because the long process of gathering teacher feedback felt inauthentic to them, teachers resisted the reform and lack of
teacher trust became a significant barrier to acceptance of the new schedule. School transformation efforts falter when teachers do not trust their leaders.

Bridich’s (2016) study showed, although “teachers have been criticized for being ‘resistant to change’ (Spillane, 1999, p. 165), . . . they are willing and eager to be included in the change process” (p. 12). One recommendation might be to engage the most influential people in the organization early so their voice is included, and they can have an impact on the decision-making process and assist in the design and implementation of the new schedule. In the case of Sherford High School, some of those influential people (e.g., the three teachers who led the revolt movement) had not been aware of the schedule decision and their “voices” became the “loud” voices leading the teachers’ revolt in the year prior to implementation.

The teachers’ revolt consisted of most faculty writing letters to the editor of the local newspaper expressing their concerns, and several faculty members organizing to speak to board members and the superintendent to try to reverse the decision. Moreover, several faculty members spoke up at key board meetings to try to get the decision rescinded, especially because they were concerned about whether the schedule would truly benefit students, and they felt their voices had been ignored during the decision-making process. Though their revolt was ultimately unsuccessful, it revealed a lot about the importance of dialogue and communication with stakeholders during school reform efforts. Teachers’ beliefs had not been adequately addressed. Yet another factor that contributed to a flawed decision-making process was insufficient communication as to why the reform was important.

**Insufficient Communication About the Rationale**

Cultural change demands clear and continuous communication so stakeholders understand the why behind a change. This is the most critical step to ensuring successful and
long-lasting change. Several stakeholders in the Sherford High School decision-making process pointed to a lack of communication about why the reform was needed. Teachers and parents cited this factor as one of the main reasons for a flawed reform implementation. Even 2 years into implementation, some parents were unclear about why the change was made and other parents said they rarely heard about the reasons why the schedule change was necessary when the decision was being made. The superintendent also agreed communication could have been more frequent and the message could have been spread in a larger variety of forums.

Previous research has pointed out that leaders should “communicate clearly with stakeholders throughout the [decision-making] process to build rapport and consensus [via dialogue]” (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 12). Most importantly, stakeholders need to understand clearly why a new schedule is necessary (Hanover Research, 2014). All in all, stakeholders involved in decision making around school schedule changes need to understand what problem the new schedule is intended to solve so they can be on board with it.

Parent comments shared in Chapter 4 revealed how parents valued being able to dialogue with other parents whose opinions were often so different from theirs. These comments signaled another lesson on this study—the importance of dialogue and authentic opportunities for all stakeholders to contribute to decision making. If the 4x4 schedule decision-making process at Sherford High School had been more dialogic, it might have yielded different results. Another important factor during the adoption and roll out phase that undermined full support for the change was the lack of meaningful professional development.

**Lack of Meaningful Professional Development**

Imposing new structures on teachers without adequate support is not an effective strategy (Hanover Research, 2014). In the case of Sherford School District, the teachers felt they had not
received sufficient professional development to adequately enact the new schedule, especially with the COVID-19 global pandemic in the background, which constrained their ability to visit other schools in the area that were implementing the 4x4 schedule. Though district leaders pointed to a list of supports offered to teachers, such as the opportunity to Zoom with teachers from other districts, a Google drive folder of sample curriculum maps from other schools, a whole-staff training session on teaching on block models, and money to pay for time to rewrite their scope and sequences, among others, teachers felt this support was insufficient. A teacher with a leadership role agreed there was barely any collaboration or dialogue around how to shift instruction for this new schedule, and what she perceived as a lack of a coaching culture in the district interfered with the ability to create a coherent plan for professional coaching and support.

Adequate professional development is one of the main factors in the successful enactment of a schedule reform (e.g., Bair & Bair, 2010). Though teachers are the most important staff members in need of training when a new schedule is implemented, Allen (2009) pointed out they often receive little to “no training” (as cited in Epps et al., 2015, p. 2) on how to implement a new schedule to better their practice. In the case of the Sherford School District, the evidence pointed to a lack of sufficient leadership actions to professionally develop teachers during the transition to the new schedule. Leaders need to clearly communicate expectations about how a new schedule should impact instruction, provide ample opportunities for collaboration, and support teachers meaningfully through the transition. Adequate professional development should be accessible to all. It has the potential of impacting teachers’ beliefs and their instructional strategies and enabling them to meet students’ learning needs.
**Teachers Were Unclear How to Change Instruction**

In the case of Sherford High School, only one “sit and get” professional development session was offered leading up to implementation that discussed different block teaching models. This one professional development was insufficient to form a strategic vision necessary to achieve meaningful change. Expectations for how instruction should change were not clear, as reported by a teacher with a leadership role. The interviews also revealed many teachers viewed the new structure as requiring a “two lessons in one” structure, rather than a revisioning of their curriculum, including ways to determine essential learnings and build a new curriculum from these.

There was insufficient dialogue around how the 4x4 schedule was supposed to impact instruction, so teachers clearly did not yet understand the changes administration was hoping for them to make, and/or were unwilling to engage in that work. These findings are congruent with previous research showing outdated teaching methods persist, even after schedule changes (Bair & Bair, 2010; Ullrich & Yeamen, 2015; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006). Indeed, school leaders do not often communicate clearly with their teachers on how a new schedule necessitates new ways of teaching, new curriculum objectives, and new instructional strategies (Corley, 1997; Hanover Research, 2014; Ireland, 2019).

In the case of Sherford School District, this lack of communication resulted in several teachers maintaining their old ways of teaching and viewing the schedule as requiring a mere technical change of “doubling the pace” of instruction. In other words, teachers were simply squeezing 2 days of content from the old schedule into 1 day under the new schedule, rather than revisioning their entire scope and sequence via identifying what was most essential and cutting nonessential standards.
Lack of Opportunities for Collaboration

Collaboration is a form of professional development, but it was currently an emergent strategy in the Sherford School District. The transition to the 4x4 schedule at Sherford High School could have been facilitated by ongoing collaboration among faculty and a few leaders who were savvy about implementation. At the time of this study, Sherford High School leaders had not created the necessary spaces or structures to shape nor direct ongoing collaboration among members of the same department. For example, department meetings were mostly informational in nature over the past few years, with little space for collaboration, thereby leaving collaboration to emerge on its own, without support. In these conditions during the transition to the new schedule, the extent to which different teams or department were able to collaborate to transition to the new schedule has remained unknown.

Merenbloom and Kalina (2013) emphasized the importance collaboration among teachers as a form of professional development that can lead to improvements in student learning. Specifically, they argued, “Time and the guidelines for collaboration to review student work and monitor and create formative or benchmark assessments, [and collaborate on] curriculum and instruction” (Merenbloom & Kalina, 2013, p. 108) can provide support for teachers. The time for collaboration can be embedded into the new schedule or into existing structures, and leaders are encouraged to shape what happens in that time to ensure teachers are engaging in the types of activities which result in their learning. At the time of the enactment of the new schedule at Sherford High School, however, no such collaborative professional development structures existed and leaders’ ability to shape what happened in other structures was limited.

Interdisciplinary professional development learning communities are one structure that have been shown to potentially have positive effects on opportunities to collaborate and on
getting teachers on the same page and improving student learning (Williams et al., 2008). However, this structure was not in place yet at Sherford High School until the 2nd year of implementation of the new schedule. This structure created a space for all teachers, about once a month, to organize in teams and discuss best practices in integrating more student talk into their lessons. However, given the lack of frequency of these meetings and lack of support for these interdisciplinary teams to meet and continue connecting outside these meetings, and given this structure was only a year old, it was unclear the extent to which it made a difference yet. Hence, a much more coordinated approach to collaboration is called for to strengthen professional learning at this site and, thus, improve the teaching and learning under the new schedule. In addition, another leadership action that has been largely lacking in the Sherford School District and a factor that significantly influenced the adoption, implementation, and buy-in from stakeholders for the schedule change was a lack of instructional support from leaders.

**Lack of Instructional Support From Leaders**

In the case of Sherford High School, in a “check the box” culture where professional supports are viewed as a series of professional learning events and resources, teachers were not immersed in a meaningful process of coaching and support. At Sherford High School, there is no coaching culture beyond the evaluation process teachers engage in, which has been limited in scope to one or two teaching observations each year. Although there is an instructional coach on campus, teachers have to opt in to this kind of support. There are no clear, schoolwide expectations that teachers should grow, and there has been little to no coaching support offered to school-level administrators.

The literature revealed successful professional development should be viewed as a process, not as an event (Guskey, 2002; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1987). Receiving feedback and
coaching support from expert instructional leaders can be a very powerful form of professional
development for teachers (Leggett & Smith, 2019). This kind of support is especially important
for teachers who are resistant to embracing new practices, particularly for the most reticent
teachers who need some pressure (Guskey, 2002) because they are unlikely to want to change on
their own (Huberman & Crandall, 1983). Moreover, leaders should strive for their growth
feedback to be perceived as nonevaluative, which requires creating a culture of growth, not a
culture of “gotcha” (Bradley, 2014; Hubbard et al., 2006). Teachers’ perception of feedback
stemming from evaluators as evaluative is another reason why decoupling professional
development from formal evaluative processes is so important. Doing so can create the
psychological safety most teachers need to embrace change and growth.

**Lessons Learned About School Reform**

Schedule changes are not just technical fixes; they are also very complex (Cuban, 2013b). As previous research has addressed, reform is unlikely to result in significant educational change if people relied on technical changes alone (Hubbard et al., 2023). Some researchers have argued a cultural change is needed along with structural change (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hubbard et al., 2023). Fullan (2001) explained educators need to go beyond the “structure of change” and develop “cultures of change,” so rather than “adopting innovations, one after another, [school systems produce] the capacity to seek, critically assess, and selectively incorporate new ideas and practices—all the time, inside the organization as well as outside it” (p. 7). This kind of continual organizational learning, which was also supported by Senge (2006), can bring about a paradigm shift in the educational system, and namely, in school reform.

Success of any significant structural change rests on the shoulders of teachers, as they are called to teach under a new arrangement (Cerit, 2013; Correnti & Rowan, 2007; Rowan &
Such change efforts are often challenged by teachers’ beliefs (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016), a lack of teacher self-efficacy (Cerit, 2013), and a lack of adequate support from school leaders (Stewart et al., 2012). According to Hubbard et al. (2023), some of the aspects of the culture of schooling that reforms push up against include teacher autonomy and top-down decision-making processes. It is difficult for teachers to change, according to Ireland (2019), partly because of their isolation and workload, which are the norm in the teaching profession.

In the case of Sherford High School, teachers did not believe the proposed 4x4 schedule was a good fit for the school site and were eager to get involved in creating other solutions. They also did not receive adequate support for the transition. Teachers viewed their involvement in the decision-making process as inauthentic. The top-down nature of the decision greatly eroded trust between teachers and school leaders, which then resulted in teachers’ unwillingness to engage in and ask for professional learning support.

The importance of creating cultures of collaboration to promote teacher learning cannot be overstated. Much research exists about what does not work (e.g., one-off seminars, decontextualized learning from outside trainers, summer professional development), but the research on what does work is nascent at best. Although there were many claims and perspectives put forth in favor of collaboration during the 1990s (Friend & Cook, 1990; Gitlin, 1999; O’Shea & O’Shea, 1997), convincing evidence has not been provided by researchers until very recently (e.g., Datnow & Park, 2018; Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018).

In the case of Sherford High School, the lack of a culture of coaching, the lack of opportunities for teachers to engage in collaboration, and a complicated time for the decision to emerge (i.e., during the COVID-19 global pandemic) made the transition painful for many teachers. Some teachers’ lack of trust has persisted at Sherford High School, even as others have
started to resign themselves and accept the new schedule. For reforms to be successful, mere
technical fixes will be insufficient to adequately address student learning. As this study of reform
has shown, schools need to (a) create cultures of learning, (b) create more coherence in teaching
and thinking about teaching, (c) provide supportive instructional leadership, and (d) involve
teachers in decision making throughout the process.

**Future Research**

There has been a lack of research regarding how leaders support teachers in gaining new
instructional strategies in the context of a new schedule change. It is important to examine the
extent to which school leaders understand and plan for the cultural changes necessary for a new
schedule change to yield improvements in instruction. Future studies should more deeply
examine the connection between structural schedule changes and cultural changes in terms of
professional development leading to improvement in teaching and learning. Future studies
should focus on how professional development and teacher collaboration are embedded—or
not—into a new scheduling model and what leaders do to shape what happens during those
moments of adult learning to ensure integration more effective instructional strategies.

It would also be useful to study specific teachers’ classrooms as they enact new
instructional strategies due to a structural reform (e.g., a schedule change) and follow their
process of learning to gain insights about the aspects of professional development that directly
impacted their ability to grow their instructional repertoire. Future research exploring different
steps in Kotter et al.’s (2021) change model, such as learning how to sustain acceleration and
reinforcing new behaviors producing success, should also be conducted.
Conclusions

As this study showed, structural reform alone in the K–12 U.S. educational system, though common, has often been inadequate to affect school change. The success of any significant structural change rests on the shoulders of teachers, as they are called to adapt to new structures. Such change efforts have often been challenged by teachers’ beliefs, a lack of teacher self-efficacy, and a lack of adequate support from school leaders.

In the case of Sherford High School, reform occurred with a top-down decision-making process, insufficient communication about the rationale, and the role teacher input would play in the decision, thus resulting in a sour power struggle between teachers and administration. The actions teachers and administrators took during the revolt phase (i.e., the year prior to the implementation of the new schedule) caused a rift in relationships between teachers and leaders that greatly eroded teachers’ trust in their leaders. The lack of teacher trust also greatly contributed to some teachers’ unwillingness to engage in professional development. However, professional development opportunities to help prepare teachers for the transition were limited and unlikely to result in changes due to the lack of coaching culture in the district.

As school districts continue to wrestle with how best to improve learning for all, school leaders need to consider carefully how decisions about reforms are made. Leaders should engage all stakeholders in transparent and creative dialogues about current student outcomes, community desires for a future vision of student success, and what is lacking to ascertain what kinds of changes would bring about the desired results. Leaders need to communicate clearly and get to the root of the issues with the community to design and implement appropriate decisions and have full support from all stakeholders, especially from those most often responsible for enacting reform—hard-working teachers. Finally, because of the importance of adequate professional
development support, district and school leaders should create structures and cultures that facilitate teacher collaboration so teachers can be less isolated and more fulfilled in their profession.
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https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813505940
## APPENDIX A

Most Popular Scheduling Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Logistics of how time is divided</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Traditional or period schedule | * Six, seven, or eight periods each day for the whole school year  
* 45–55 minutes per period  
* Approximately 255 minutes per week in each class  
(Hanover Research, 2014) |
| 4x4 or semester block schedule | * Students can take up to 8 courses, half of them in the Fall semester and the other half in the Spring semester.  
* 86-100 minutes per period per day  
* 425 minutes of instruction in each class per week.  
(Hanover Research, 2014) |
| A/B, or alternating, block schedule | * A block schedule in which students take three or four different classes every other day (for a total of 6-8 classes throughout the school year)  
* classes last between 85 and 100 minutes  
(Hanover Research, 2014) |
| Trimester block schedule | * The year is divided into three trimesters  
* Students can take between 3 to 5 classes per trimester  
* five, 70 minute class periods per day.  
* Students take the same classes every day during the term and earn 0.5 credits per class per trimester.  
(Hanover Research, 2014) |
| 75-75-30 block schedule | * The school year is divided into two longer 75 day terms and an intensive 30 day term at the end of the school year.  
* During each of the first two longer terms, students take anywhere between 4 and 6 courses and in the last term, they can take either one or two courses  
(Hanover Research, 2014) |
| Copernican schedule | * Longer blocks for core classes and shorter blocks for electives  
* One 4-hour period for core classes (core teachers should collaborate to determine how to use the time) or two 2-hour periods for core classes  
* 2-3 shorter periods for electives  
* Students switch classes every 60-90 days  
(Clark & Saroyan, 2014) |
## APPENDIX B

Meta-Analysis of Select Studies on the Impact of Scheduling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (date) type</th>
<th>Research topic</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Critique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trenta &amp; Newman (2022) <em>peer-reviewed</em></td>
<td>Compared data on student outcomes under traditional and block schedule over time</td>
<td>4-year longitudinal study Examined GPAs and attendance, Ohio Proficiency Test Scores, and ACT Scores Data for 500 students from the classes of 1997, 2000, 2001 and 2002</td>
<td>Suggested block scheduling was associated with improvements in per-class-GPA on core classes but not overall GPA. No significant difference in ACT scores was seen.</td>
<td>One strength of this study is that its methods responded directly to the District board Request for a study with “hard” data. Cannot establish a causal relationship between block schedule and improved student performance because of the ex post facto research design. No other variables were examined, just “hard data”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labak et al. (2020) <em>peer-reviewed</em></td>
<td>Compared achievement in science between block and traditional schedule</td>
<td>281 high school students in all grades Pretest and posttest given after experiencing one unit of teaching in either of the two scheduling models Teachers were provided uniform lesson plans to follow</td>
<td>Both the grade level of students AND block schedule had a positive impact on students’ final performance on the science exam, regardless of the students’ overall skill level. However, students’ overall skill level was also influenced</td>
<td>There is no information regarding how long the unit of instruction lasted, but definitely less than a year. Uniform lesson plans may have still been delivered differently by different teachers with varying instructional skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (date) type</td>
<td>Research topic</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poppink et al. (2020) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Compared adequate yearly progress (AYP) across schools and tried to establish relations hip to several variables</td>
<td>Used data from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing survey to identify schools and teachers somewhat randomly (schools with more teachers are more likely to be picked).</td>
<td>by their grade level. Block-schedule (vs. single-schedule) classes improve students’ performance in the third year only. The first two grade levels of students achieved better under the traditional schedule. No difference in achievement was seen among the 4th year students. 4th year students likely already had enough prior knowledge that they could learn effectively regardless of the schedule used. Lesson outcomes for the first two grade levels were more fact-based, whereas the 3rd/4th years were more conceptual, lending more credibility to the idea that conceptual learning is enhanced in longer blocks and that traditional blocks are better for more factual content. The researchers should have created conceptual units or at least attempted to match the level of rigor in each unit across grade levels. National study with lots of schools. The school is the unit of analysis, not students.</td>
<td>Sets. Urban schools without block scheduling were 1.524 times (1 ÷ .656) as likely to make AYP as urban schools with block scheduling. No other effects of block scheduling were seen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (date) type</td>
<td>Research topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epps et al. (2015) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Comparison of student achievement on core subject and occupational skills</td>
<td>A first phase identified secondary teachers in Kentucky agriculture programs who reported their schools’ schedules</td>
<td>Students performed best in the occupational skill of horticulture when they have a longer class period, probably thanks to having more time for labs.</td>
<td>Modified schedules are not clearly defined and authors recommend additional research on what this means. Students in occupational fields may be</td>
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<td>Author (date) type</td>
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<tr>
<td>assessments as determined by different schedules in secondary agricultural programs</td>
<td>researchers assessed by Department of Education state data about student achievement at each of these schools, including data about core subject scores and occupational skill scores (agribusiness, agricultural mechanics, horticulture, natural resources, production crop, and production livestock)</td>
<td>secondary agricultural students are not doing well on most of the core subject tests, which highlights the need for teachers to integrate more core skills into the agricultural curriculum.</td>
<td>The trimester schedule was associated with the lowest scores on core subject tests. (this is similar to another study of trimesters with regards to low performing students).</td>
<td>This ex post facto design did not have a pretest or posttest. It is just a snapshot in time of how Kentucky agricultural students are doing. A lot of questions remain about what the instruction was like at each of the different schools. We need to understand why different schedules resulted in different results on standardized tests and that involves examining more school-level factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Impact of the trimester schedule on students at risk of failing in students who are not doing as well academically as their peers overall.</td>
<td>Bair &amp; Bair (2010)</td>
<td>Peer-reviewed</td>
<td>The length of the study and the research design allowed the researchers to understand how contextual nuances shape the</td>
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<td>Author (date) type</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>math and race/ethnicity science classes</td>
<td>Research lasted 3 years from 2006-2009</td>
<td>22 math and science classrooms observed</td>
<td>Interviewed seven administrators, 22 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document Analysis, such as curricular documents</td>
<td>Employed member checking</td>
<td>The lecture method dominated because teachers felt there was no time for inquiry.</td>
<td>Teachers thought students, especially struggling students, did not have enough time to process all the information.</td>
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<td>The gap between trimesters could be as long as 9 months, thus leading students to forget content and leading the teachers to take more time to review at the beginning of each course.</td>
<td>The school did not meet its AYP goal the year it implemented a trimester schedule.</td>
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<td>As a results of not meeting AYP, teachers were asked to focus on test prep and cut out standards not related to the test.</td>
<td>Teachers reported that students who failed a class had to retake it the subsequent trimester and thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Does a great job of identifying constraining and supporting factors to successful implementation of a trimester schedule, such as professional development for both administrators and teachers.</td>
<td>implementation of the trimester block schedule. No student voices included.</td>
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<td>There is no mention of any student-level quantitative data to see how specific students are performing before and after the trimester schedule.</td>
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<td>Author</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kramer &amp; Keller (2008) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Impact of both 4x4 block scheduling</td>
<td>Three groups of students examined.</td>
<td>Students in the Treatment Group completed more hours of math coursework.</td>
<td>The study did not use the classroom as the unit of analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

lost space in their schedule for electives, which was one of the purposes of the trimester schedule, to make more space for electives. However, low-performing students missed out. However, teachers reported that high achieving students benefited from the trimester schedule. Trimesters hurt students at risk of academic failure and worsen the achievement gap between low and high achievers. Decreased results stem from lack of professional development regarding the selection of standards to be taught as well as how to engage their students in inquiry in the context of the new schedule.
<table>
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<th>Results</th>
<th>Critique</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>summary report of a research study</td>
<td>new high school math curriculum implemented simultaneously</td>
<td>and two treatment groups were class of 2001 and 2002. Collected data from 1994-1996 also as a comparison group. Students were the unit of analysis.</td>
<td>Significantly more students took more advanced math courses in the treatment group and also received higher grades on those courses. By the end of 11th grade, students in either group had different areas of strengths with regards to specific algebraic knowledge. By the end of 12th grade, students in the treatment group outperformed students in the comparison group on all measured content standards, especially problem solving and conceptual understanding.</td>
<td>described as having high reform capacity already. This begs questions regarding how schools with lower reform capacity might be supported in the process of reform. The study includes a list of capacity-building actions the school took prior to and during the planning and implementation of the reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biesinger et al. (2008) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Effects of alternating block scheduling on students’ self-efficacy, attitude in math</td>
<td>Study lasted 1 year Pretest in September and Posttest in May Mixed-method quasi-experimental design with convenience sampling</td>
<td>Student attitudes toward mathematics declined for students under a traditional schedule and did not change for block scheduled students. Both groups experienced significant increases in</td>
<td>Two of the treatment schools were in more affluent areas whereas the other two were in a lower socioeconomic area. Study included mostly 10th grade students only because they were new to block scheduling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (date) type</td>
<td>Research topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>math instruction</td>
<td>All schools were significantly large (more than 2300 students) and included over 50% minority populations</td>
<td>mathematics self-efficacy, but block scheduling increased self-efficacy a lot more.</td>
<td>No changes in teaching strategies were observed, and 90% teachers indicated in their postobservation debriefs that the class observed was typical of their teaching routine and student behaviors.</td>
<td>Class sizes in the comparison group seem to have been significantly larger than in the three treatment groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>242 participants in the study with 118 in the treatment group and 124 in the comparison group.</td>
<td></td>
<td>90% of the teaching observed was teacher-centered.</td>
<td>The treatment group contained a higher % of Caucasian students and lower percentage of Hispanic students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students took two surveys to measure attitude toward math and self-efficacy at the beginning of the year and at the end.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Authors interpreted that teachers need professional development so they can learn how to use the additional time provided in a block schedule effectively.</td>
<td>The discussion of the paper contradicts one aspect of the results. While the results state that students in block schedule schools did not change their attitudes toward math, the discussion states that block schedule caused increases in attitudes toward math.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12 random students selected for 3 focus group interviews.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interviews of students revealed that students liked the alternating block schedule and felt it benefited them academically.</td>
<td>Highlights the need to look more closely at contextual factors that impact the implementation of block scheduling at different sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Classroom observations in 9 of the 22 classrooms, randomly selected.</td>
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</table>

<p>| Hynes-Hunter &amp; Avery | Use of time in Physical | Four high schools and one middle school in the | Students in block schedule spent more time | There is little research on the impact of |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Author (date) type</th>
<th>Research topic</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Critique</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2007) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>education classes under block scheduling</td>
<td>Northeast and one high school and one middle school in the West coast</td>
<td>waiting and being managed than students in outstanding P.E. classes, as defined by Siedentop et al.</td>
<td>schedules on P.E. so this article contributes something important to the understanding of how block schedules affect learning in non-core subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis et al. (2005) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Effect of block scheduling on student math and reading achievement</td>
<td>Ex post facto longitudinal design</td>
<td>Students in 4x4 block scheduling had greater gains scores in reading and math than students in the traditional schedule or the alternating A/B block schedule.</td>
<td>The ACT is self-selecting so the pool of students taking it is generally college-bound. There was a higher percentage of teachers certified in their subject area in the high school with a 4x4 schedule, which might have skewed the results.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three high schools in the same Northern Colorado district with different schedules. 355 students met the inclusion criteria, those for whom 9th grade 2021 Levels test</td>
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<td>Author (date) type</td>
<td>Research topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nichols (2005) Peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Impact of block schedule on English and language arts achievement</td>
<td>Five Indiana schools using 4x4 or modified A/B Block with 8 blocks</td>
<td>Small overall average increases in student achievement for language arts courses were seen after adoption of Block scheduling. However, low-income students and minority students did not seem to increase their English achievement after block scheduling. Class enrollments in language arts were also increased and more classes of that nature seemed to have been offered.</td>
<td>There was not much consideration of contextual factors which might have influenced highest test scores. Researcher admits they did not address potentially confounding factors such as teacher instructional styles. Grades are not necessarily a reliable measure of student understanding of the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottge et al. (2003) Peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Impact of block schedules and traditional schedules on students with and without disabilities</td>
<td>Schools were selected from a state in the upper midwest. 12 small schools, six medium schools and six large schools randomly selected to participate and further selection required for the</td>
<td>No difference was seen on student outcome measures on mandated state tests between any student group or any scheduling model. Teachers also reported equal levels of satisfaction and</td>
<td>Few students with disabilities took the ACT to begin with. No classroom observations were conducted to triangulate the instructional strategies being used in each school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author (date) type</td>
<td>Research topic</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenkins et al. (2002) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Teachers’ perceptions traditional vs. block schedule and perceptions about their use of alternative instructional strategies</td>
<td>2,167 North Carolina High school teachers, 1,036 teaching in non-block schools and 1,131 teaching in blocked schools</td>
<td>Teachers in the block-schedule teachers reported high use of lecture/direct instruction, small groups/structured pairs, and cooperative learning. Traditional-schedule teachers reported similar or slightly lower use of these strategies.</td>
<td>No examination of available professional development nor prior teacher training and experiences. A teacher who does not know what they do not know might underestimate the amount of training it takes to understand and carry out an instructional</td>
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</table>
Teachers rated the frequency with which they used specific instructional strategies and those mentioned on the survey were defined for teachers who may not have been familiar with them. They also rated their perceived level of preparation to teach with certain strategies and the relevance of those strategies to their subject area.

As far as how prepared teachers felt to use a variety of teaching strategies, neither group reported having experienced significant training. Moderate training was reported for most strategies. Low training was reported by both groups on strategies such as integrated/thematic teaching and Socratic seminars. Teachers in block schedules are not using more innovative teaching despite having more time in the block. They conclude that strategy effectively.

Every respondent potentially has a different mental model of what these strategies look and sound like in practice. What is clear is that professional development, planning and support is a necessary step in ensuring successful implementation of block schedule. Some of their recommendations are unrealistic. For example, they recommend taking disciplinary action against teachers who are not willing to follow principles of block teaching without stating what those principles are. In reality, there are many constraints which make it hard to take disciplinary action against ineffective teachers. Moreover, the paternalistic idea
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<tr>
<th>Author (date) type</th>
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<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Critique</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evans et al. (2002) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Evaluating outcomes and impact of block scheduling in schools</td>
<td>Three New Jersey Schools in three different districts that used 4x4 block schedules first implemented in 1997-98. One urban, one suburban and one rural. Collected teacher, student and parent opinions via surveys, interviews and focus groups. Data was collected</td>
<td>Many teachers reported a change in their instructional approaches. Students can take more courses and seem more engaged in school. Student achievement has improved as measured by test scores, honor roll percentage and fewer students failing.</td>
<td>of taking disciplinary action against a teacher is contrary to a culture of coaching, learning and growth. Another unrealistic recommendation is to have teachers take 1-2 years of staff development to prepare to teach in a block schedule. This might unnecessarily delay an important reform whereas learning while actually doing is perhaps more valuable. Very small sample of schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (date) type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arnold (2002) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Comparing student achievement between block and traditional schedule</td>
<td>Compared 5 years’ worth of test scores on the TAP, a Virginia standardized test that measured all core skills, including reading, math, writing, using sources of information, social studies and science. Collected data from the Virginia Department of Education and from mail questionnaires. Population was public high schools in Virginia in two different types of schedules, traditional and A/B block.</td>
<td>No significant increase in student achievement over time in the block schedule group. The only important increase happened during the implementation year of the block schedule, but the effect disappeared thereafter.</td>
<td>Cannot establish causality with this type of research design, only association. No other data was collected. For example, they didn’t collect qualitative data. No information about what professional development was given, if any, before and during the implementation of block schedule.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rice et al. (2002) peer-reviewed</td>
<td>Effect of block scheduling in student achievement and teachers’ use of time in</td>
<td>5,449 students with data available for their math teachers and classes in the spring of 1990. The students were enrolled in 733 different</td>
<td>There was a positive association between block scheduling and teachers’ reported use of varied instructional methods and more individualized</td>
<td>This study relies on teachers self-reporting by filling out surveys, but classroom observations need to be conducted to have a better idea of how the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author (date)</td>
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<td>high schools.</td>
<td>They worked with four variables: Student achievement, as measured by the NELS:88 achievement test mathematics scores, Use of class time, as measured by teacher self-reporting via surveys, Block scheduled courses</td>
<td>instruction. However, they found that block scheduling did not result in gains in efficiency as to how class time was used. However, block schedule negatively impacted students’ tenth-grade mathematics scores, controlling for other factors. It appears that increased time in a block does not improve student achievement, regardless of whether teachers use better instructional practices.</td>
<td>extra time is being used. Uses data from the 1990s. A lot more schools since have developed strategies for teaching in the block. Not much information about what professional development was offered to teachers before and during implementation.</td>
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APPENDIX C

Interview Questionnaire

Welcome Script

Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview for my research on professional development and schedule changes. I really appreciate your time. As a reminder, I will be audio recording the interview. You can also stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Semistructured Interviews

Teacher Interviews:
1. How and why was the schedule adopted? Who was involved?
2. What is your opinion of the new schedule? Did you support the decision when it came about?
3. How does your day look different? How has that impacted your instruction?
4. What kinds of support have you had during the implementation?
   a. I will probe to find out what was most useful and why and what was least useful and why and then go deeper into professional development
   b. How was professional development announced?
   c. What were some of the professional development experiences like?
   d. Of the types of professional development you received, which one did you think was most effective and why?
   e. Was there any follow-up on the professional development?
   f. What did your principal (or other instructional leaders) do that made professional development successful?
   g. I will probe to find out what was most useful and why and what was least useful and why
   h. Is there a professional development experience that you wish you would have received?
5. What has been challenging during the implementation?
   a. I will probe to find out what was most useful and why and what was least useful and why
6. What other factors played a role in supporting or challenging your implementation of the new schedule?
   a. Eg: union, board, community member opinions, support from colleagues, etc.
7. What change have you seen since last year?
   a. Has it become easier in year 2?
   b. Are there new challenges?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything more I should know about this that I haven’t asked?

School Leader Interview:
1. What motivated you to adopt this schedule change? What were the issues?
2. What was the decision-making process like to switch to this schedule?
3. How supportive were different stakeholders of the decision?
   a. board
   b. Parents
   c. Teachers
   d. Students
4. What kinds of professional development experiences did you offer? How effective were they? (I will ask about a variety of different forms, such as instructional coaching, feedback, peer collaboration, differentiated support, teacher leadership empowerment, and more.)
   a. What do you think made PD successful?
   b. What were some of the challenges of PD?
   c. I will probe to find out what was most effective and why and what was least effective and why
5. Was there a particular focus to your professional development during the transition to the new schedule? If so, what was it?
6. How do you know when professional development is successful?
7. How do you know what success looks like when implementing this new schedule?
8. What were the challenges of implementing this schedule?
   a. How did you address them? What worked and what did not?
9. What change have you seen since last year?
   a. Has it become easier in year 2?
   b. Are there new challenges?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything more I should know about this that I haven’t asked?

**Parent Interview:**
1. How did the new schedule come about and why? Who was involved?
2. What was the decision-making process like to switch to this schedule?
3. How was the new schedule communicated to you?
4. Were you involved in the decision-making process, and if so, how?
5. Can you talk to me about how you felt about it at the time?
   a. What were the concerns you had, if any, at the time?
6. What are some differences between the old schedule and the new schedule?
7. How has the schedule affected your child?
   a. I will probe to find out the impact and why
8. In your opinion, what are some benefits and/or drawbacks to the new 4x4 schedule?
9. What did your child know about the change and how were they made aware?
10. What would have been ideal actions by administrators and teachers to best prepare your child for this schedule? Be specific, including actions that did happen and those that you wish would have happened.
11. What change have you seen since last year?
   a. Has it become easier in year 2?
   b. Are there new challenges?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything more I should know about this that I haven’t asked?
APPENDIX D

Timeline of Events in the Four Phases

**PHASE 1: PROBLEM-FRAMING (2016-2018)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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| May 2016 | Superintendent hired           | Superintendent: “I want to do the best I can to focus on students, learning and keeping the Sherford Unified School District as a great place to be a student, teacher and employee that supports our collective goal of students being successful, encouraged to take risks and be the best versions of themselves.”  
(Superintendent, Article in the Local Newspaper by Felix, 2016) |
| August 2018 | Vice-principal promoted to principal | This is a place that allows a kid to shine. There are limitless opportunities to shine . . . I come in, not afraid, but extremely excited and prepared to support all of the programs. My goal is to make sure I give all of our amazing programs what they need to continue to thrive.”  
(Quote by incoming Principal in an Article in the Local Newspaper, Troxel, 2018). |
| November 2018 | Board approves the superintendent’s long-range plan and principal updates board on schedule committee | The new high school Principal’s first update to the board, includes a mention of a Bell Schedule Review Committee and says that the committee is set to meet for the first time in December 2008 and includes representatives from almost every department. The committee will be a year and a half venture where they will examine data. |

**PHASE 2: STAKEHOLDER INPUT (2018-2020)**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 2018</td>
<td>First bell schedule study committee meeting</td>
<td>Principal establishes a Bell Schedule Study Committee with teacher members from a variety of different departments and calls for a meeting. This first committee meeting was guided by specific beliefs, considerations, questions, data about current status, possible action steps, and possible timeline for implementation of a new schedule. These aspects were provided in bullet point form to the staff on a document. During the first meeting of the committee, the staff discussed and provided feedback on these bullet points,</td>
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<td>January 2019</td>
<td>Superintendent’s state of the district address at the board meeting</td>
<td>The address described both accomplishments and challenges/next steps. Next steps include expanding enrichment opportunities, dual credit opportunities, the Bell schedule/instructional minute study and continuing to seek efficiencies while sustaining and/or growing programs and experiences for students.</td>
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<td>January 2019</td>
<td>Principal sends an email to committee members with a draft of the whole-staff survey</td>
<td>After the first meeting, one of the major actions decided on is the creation of a teacher survey to carry out with the whole staff. Principal 1 sent an email to members of the committee with a draft of the following survey questions, for the committee’s approval. - List top three strengths of our current bell schedule - List two three challenges of our current bell schedule - List top three things you would like to see in a new schedule - How do you envision using an advisory period to support students’ social and emotional health, school culture and academic support? (Bell Study Schedule Committee Binder) The final survey was approved with the following questions: - List top three strengths of our current bell schedule - List two three challenges of our current bell schedule - List top three things you would like to see in a new schedule - Do you prefer a year-long class or would you be interested in exploring semester-long block classes? - Should we consider a later start time for high school students? - Tell us how you believe we can best support students’ social and emotional health, positive school culture and academic support?</td>
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<td>January 2019</td>
<td>All staff survey on strengths and challenges of current schedule</td>
<td>The All staff survey was implemented and 47 staff members participated. Some notable responses included: Strengths of our current bell schedule: - Established schedule and has worked well for over a</td>
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<td>decade, everyone’s used to it, teachers have already planned their scope and sequence around it</td>
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<td>● Hybrid of traditional with a couple of blocks, provides variety and balance</td>
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<td>● Year-long, can go slowly</td>
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<td>● Flexibility</td>
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<td>Challenges of our current bell schedule</td>
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<td>● Timing of final exams is problematic</td>
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<td>● The two semesters are not balanced, one is longer than the other</td>
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<td>● Total student load at one time (would be smaller and more manageable with a different schedule such as a 4x4)</td>
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<td>● Schedule is too inconsistent (eg: different start times and lengths of periods) and could confuse students</td>
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<td>● Only 6 choices per year (limiting)</td>
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<td>● Not enough block days, more block days could alleviate student stress</td>
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<td>● Block days are hard for lower level students</td>
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<td>● Some teachers want all traditional bell schedule, some want more of block</td>
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<td>Things you would like to see in a new schedule</td>
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<td>● Ending the semester before Xmas break</td>
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<td>● Longer class periods / more block days</td>
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<td>● Smaller class sizes or smaller student loads</td>
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<td>● Stable schedule throughout the week</td>
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<td>● More prep time</td>
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<td>● Keep it the same, no change needed</td>
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<td>Year-long class vs. semester-long block classes</td>
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<td>● 10 classroom teachers of 47 expressed interest in exploring semester-long block classes</td>
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<td>● 7 non-classroom support teachers (eg: Counselors, Special-Ed team) expressed interest in exploring semester-long block classes</td>
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<td>● The rest of the staff favored keeping the year-long schedule</td>
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<td>Later start time</td>
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<td>● About half of the staff was in favor and the other half was opposed</td>
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<td>Supporting students’ social and emotional health, positive school culture and academic support</td>
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<td>● More staff collaboration is needed</td>
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<td>● More options for classes</td>
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<td>● More interventions for different groups</td>
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|      |       | ● Provide more support for students but outside of the instructional time (vs. having students take time out
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<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 2019</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>One board member references having met with Principal 1 and briefly learned about what they are doing with the bell schedule committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2019</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>Principal presents first major update on the work of the Bell Schedule Review Committee. board expresses a sense of urgency for Principal 1 to present a concrete proposal to the board.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>All-staff survey</td>
<td>In June 2019, the staff reflected on a number of topics related to the schedule, including:</td>
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|             | reflecting on double block and other scheduling aspects | ● how they experienced a block schedule that had occurred earlier that year  
● How they felt about a potential “flex period” and what they would do during such a period  
● Start and end times they would prefer  
● New electives or classes they would add to the schedule if the space became available  
● How they felt about a potential advisory period  
● Structures they propose to improve Social Emotional health and School Culture  
Notable teacher opinions from this survey were:  
Lack of support for Block Scheduling:  
“It was difficult for students to stay focused”  
“You long for Physical education”  
“Honestly horrible. Student engagement did not last the entire time.”  
“The lower-level students don’t have the attention span that AP students have”  
Support for Block Scheduling:  
“Kids loved it, they said it is nice to focus on 3 classes instead of 6.”  
“I definitely enjoyed the slower pace”  
Lack of support for Flex period:  
“I presented the information to several students while I was completing this survey and the overall response was negative. My grandfather use to say, “if it’s not broken, why fix it?””  
“My first thought is that this is a waste of instructional minutes. Solid, good students work independently. Those who don’t will be off task during this time.” |
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<tr>
<td>October 15, 2019</td>
<td>Bell schedule committee meeting with the MTSS Committee</td>
<td>Principal 1 convened both the Bell Schedule Study Committee and the MTSS committees to meet on October 15, 2019. During this meeting, Principal 1 gives a “sneak peek” that he supports a seven-period schedule that includes an advisory period in which teachers will still teach 5 periods. During this meeting, staff members discussed different schedule models and designated one staff member from the Science Department volunteered to compile and graphically represent different potential schedule models. Teachers were also directed to come up with questions and lists of strengths and weaknesses of the different models. (Bell Study Schedule Committee Binder)</td>
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| October 17, 2019 | Sample schedule models developed by a staff member and decision is made to bring these models to the whole staff. | Principal sends out an email to the both the Schedule Committee and the MTSS committees including the schedule models developed by the staff member and asks for feedback regarding whether these models should be discussed in upcoming department meetings or as a whole staff. One of the counselors replies that she believes “presenting to the whole staff at once would be better so that everyone gets the correct information all at
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<tr>
<td>Late October 2019- November 2019</td>
<td>Emails regarding data exchanged</td>
<td>Between October 2019 and November 2019, lots of emails were exchanged between site administration (Principal, Registrar, Vice Principal, a Teacher with a Leadership Role) and members of the committee (one teacher in particular) inquiring about different data, especially A/G graduation rates for the high school in comparison to the county and the breakdown of those kids who graduated non-eligible and wanting more information. These emails were generally sent to everyone in the committee in reply-all fashion. There is also data compiled on the 60+ students who graduated non-eligible to ascertain when and why they fell off track. There is also data on Ds and Fs and the percentage of students who had them (Bell Study Schedule Committee Binder)</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>The superintendent’s update on the Long Range Plan includes information about a ThoughtExchange with the community, especially parents, calling for more opportunities for students.</td>
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</table>
| November 2019 | Parent survey on the bell schedule | The school pushes out a survey to parents with one question: “What questions do you have about the Bell Schedule?” 10 parents completed the survey, asking a variety of question and make a variety of comments:  
  - Two parents do not support for a seven-period schedule, thinking it is too stressful and that it should be a choice  
  - Concern about kids with sports  
  - Questions about which one is better for college, 7 or 8 period options  
  - One parent wondering where the 8-period option went.  
  - Two parent suggest extending the school year calendar rather than the bell schedule |
<p>| November 2019 | Classroom conversations about the bell schedule | Principal 1 conducted a six classroom visits to talk to students about the bell schedule and collect feedback on index cards (unclear how many he did and with whom).                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| November 2019 | Board meeting                    | During Principal 1’s yearly update to the board on high |</p>
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<td>2019</td>
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<td>school matters, he talks about how the school is not in compliance with instructional minutes, and updates on the process the Bell Schedule committee is going through to examine different possibilities for the future bell schedule. He briefly alludes to a 6 or 7 period bell schedule that the committee is looking at.</td>
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<td>One board member asks if the 4x4 bell schedule has been at all considered by the committee. Principal 1 responds that last spring the committee had determined that a semester schedule was not a good fit for the community. A board member asks about the financial impact of different schedules. Board member urges Principal 1 to display strong leadership to make a decision and keep the process moving.</td>
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</table>
| December 18, 2019 | All staff meeting | Different Schedule models are presented and discussed at the November 2019 all-staff meeting. Notes from the meeting indicate various staff had questions and concerns regarding:  
- The small size of the school being limiting to providing the types of opportunities we want to provide, this would work better in a larger school  
- Two teachers questions about what the intent behind the change truly is. Why are we doing this?  
- Another teacher highlights that questions about intention resonate with him. Further questions: why is there money available for a change in schedule but not for fixing what is not working in the constraints of the current schedule.  
- Teachers want to know if they would still teach 5 periods and not be expected to teach more  
- Teachers prefers to lower class sizes rather than adding more teachers  
- Teachers want to know if department input is going to be honored and respected  
- Does not see what it is we are doing wrong: “Do we want to be like everyone else or do we want to be better?”  
- Resistance against building in flex periods and advisory, don’t necessarily feel these will bring effective change  
- One teacher questions: “Who’s for this? At what point are we going to stop debating this and ask? Feels like the only department in favor of this is the front office.”  
At this meeting, Principal 1 also polled their staff on their attitudes about the process and different preferences. Notable responses include: |
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| January 2020 | Bell schedule tea with Principal 1         | • Most teachers are not satisfied with the process of participation related to the bell schedule up to this point  
• Concerns about teacher and student stress and overwhelm for a change. Key words include “mental fatigue,” “stress”, “overwhelm”.  
• Concerns about being able to get through the curriculum with less time  
• Most teachers believe that the most common reason students fail is lack of motivation, lack of skill or lack of work completion  
• Some teachers still don’t understand the why for a change  
• Questions about the financial, logistical and personal impact of the schedule  
• 52% of the teachers polled support maintaining the status quo (6 period schedule), 30% see a benefit to switching to a seven-period schedule but want more input as to the decision, and 17% need more information before making a decision.  
• Teachers also suggest more ways to expand the process, such as having the board observe faculty meetings with faculty members discussing the schedule, more department input on the schedule and being able to visit schools with alternative schedules. One teacher wrote in the poll, “have the sense that my NO has power/weight.” (Bell Study Schedule Committee Binder). |
| January 2020 | Principal proposes a seven-period bell schedule | Principal 1 offered several slots in his calendar where teachers could meet with him to discuss the Bell Schedule transition, both in the teachers lounge for small groups (up to 3 hours) and in his office for one on one meetings (he blocked off 6 hours for this). (Bell Study Schedule Committee Binder).  

According to a document in the Bell Schedule Study Committee Binder, there is a proposal put forth by Principal 1 in January 2020 for a seven-period bell schedule with an additional 30 minute advisory period. Students who are on track only required to enroll in 6 periods, and those who are falling behind are required to enroll in 7 periods. Teachers are to teach 5 of the 7 periods. The back page of this document lists a question from the superintendent. It is unclear if the answer to the question was also provided by the superintendent or is Principal 1’s reading on the situation. The question asks, “Will the governing board support a seven period day with an understanding that it will have an impact on our budget?” |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2020</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>The question is answered “yes” with justification regarding how important it is for students to have access to programs and opportunities. The superintendent’s update on the Long Range Plan shares data about other comparable local schools with similar or better test scores. The schools presented have a 4x4 or a trimester schedule, indicating that a change in this school’s schedule could help raise student achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2020</td>
<td>Superintendent’s state of the district address at the board meeting</td>
<td>Superintendent reiterates the academic achievement goal of the long-range plan (that students will perform at top 10% in the county), the why or guiding principles of the plan and communicates a sense of urgency for change. He tells a story about the reluctance to change and stresses that students will benefit from change. <em>Our systems may not be working for all our students every day.</em> (superintendent)</td>
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<td>February 2020</td>
<td>Parent meetings about the bell schedule February 5</td>
<td>Principal 1 hosts morning parent meetings to discuss the Bell Schedule. At least 13 parents’ names are reflected in the sign-in sheet for this day.</td>
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<td>February 10 Principal 1 hosts a parent meeting in the evening to discuss the Bell Schedule. At least 28 parents’ names are reflected in the sign-in sheet for this day.</td>
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<td>March 2020</td>
<td>Principal’s report to the board on the bell schedule</td>
<td>Principal 1 gives a Report on the High School Bell Schedule. An interim schedule will need to be developed for 2020-2021 to become compliant with instructional minutes before a more permanent schedule is voted on for the 2021-22 school year. A teacher brought in her students’ opinions which largely favored retaining a six-period day with slightly longer class periods rather than adding a seventh period in the interim schedule. Several different District and School Leaders provide data and information about the need for a significant shift in the bell schedule. The board urges Principal 1 to make a decision on an interim schedule as soon as possible. The superintendent states that Principal 1 can decide on this interim schedule as long as it is compliant with instructional minutes. The board does not need to vote on approving the interim schedule. Board further expresses a sense of urgency to adopt a permanent schedule that expands opportunities for the</td>
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There have been questions over the last year whether or not this is top-down, bottom-up, grassroots, I don’t care. We had a list of things that we were trying to accomplish with the long-range plan to provide our students with better opportunities, and we’re still trying to get that to them. And this will get that to them a year late, but it will get that to them. So as a board member, I am willing to support you in your next steps. Have as many meetings as you have, talk to as many people as you want, talk to as many children as you want. I don’t care who you have to talk to, but on May 14th, when you come to me, we’re going to be looking to vote on a permanent bell schedule change that accomplishes the things that we’ve been trying to accomplish for the last 18 months... And I’m going to be really, really upfront with you and tell you that based on some of the things that [the staff member] read to us today about students not wanting seven periods, well if they don’t want seven and think seven is going to be hectic, let’s just give them four. So that’s kind of where I’m leaning right now, giving you that 4x4.

(board member)

April 2020  Board meeting  During this board meeting, the district recommends the adoption of an interim schedule to be implemented in the 2020-2021 school year, including six-periods similar to the old one but with longer periods to bring the school into compliance with the State with regards to instructional minutes. superintendent states that they are letting Principal 1 decide on what that interim schedule looks like exactly and just trusting him as long as it is compliant with instructional minutes. The board does not need to vote on approving the interim schedule.

“Our recommendation in summary is to adopt a six-period schedule for 1 year, the 2020-2021 school year that will extend minutes in each period to be compliant with the state. And during that time, we plan to engage with staff immediately to look at what planning needs to happen to adopt a seven or eight period day in the 2021-2022 school year, which will be a May report, what that recommendation is. Part of our reason for not moving ahead with the seven period schedule next year and staying with the 6-period schedule is given the circumstances and planning involved in a significant bell schedule change, we feel that we need that full year as stated in last month’s report to plan, provide professional
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<td>May 8, 2020</td>
<td>Zoom meeting with staff to address concerns prior to the decision</td>
<td>&quot;Not sure why this decision HAS to be made at the next board meeting. It would be respectful of everyone to acknowledge that COVID closures changed the game for everyone. I wish we would settle up the bell schedule for compliance and then table the other optional changes while we wait for a more stable return&quot; (Teacher). According to a teacher poll, “I think it was close to 75% of us said we didn’t want to consider 4x4” (Teacher).</td>
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| May 2020   | Board meeting where the 4x4 schedule is adopted                     | Director of Learning formally recommends the adoption of a 4x4 schedule. The board unanimously approves moving to the 4x4 schedule starting in the 2021-22 school year. Nobody, anybody in this town, nobody in this town could accuse us of rushing this through. And that’s probably the understatement of the day. We’ve been looking at this for a long time. I believe this is the third time we’ve seen a version of this presentation. I applaud your thoroughness, and just . . . really reaching out to our staff and listening . . . We also heard, I think if I would, not fault, but if I would point out anything from this whole process is I don’t feel like we had enough information coming, enough communication with our parents. I think that, I mean we got three letters in support of a 4x4 schedule from parents and I think there are a lot of parents out there that support this . . . Schools across the country are adopting a 4x4 schedule. So I know we’re on the right track. And I hope that during the next year, not only-- I know you will have a very robust plan to work with our teachers on understanding their new pacing and the new format that they’re going to be in. But I also hope that there’s a concerted effort to work with parents and students to really help them realize the potential. Right now, 50% of our high school students aren’t going to see any of this. So our 10th and 9th graders and incoming 8th graders, I think that those are the populations that we really, really need to simultaneously, as we work with our teachers, work with them to help them understand what this is all about. And like I said, I think it’s going like wildfire across the country. So more
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| February 2021 | Board meeting       | During this meeting, there is a report on the schedule transition. District staff continue to provide a rationale for the shift to a 4x4 schedule and data supporting the change. They also discuss preparations underway by counselors and teachers and what the school is doing to educate parents about the new 4x4 schedule. Some of the new board members ask questions regarding teacher concerns about the schedule change, especially at this time during the pandemic. The superintendent ends the meeting with comments acknowledging teacher concerns while explaining why he thinks this is an appropriate time to transition.  
  “First of all, I think unprecedented is the word of 2020, not pivot. I want to acknowledge that the concern from our teachers is real. I think that we’re all experiencing fatigue. I can understand the frustration and the anxiety associated with that. When we look at the proposed bell schedule at either 90 or 95 minutes, that represents either a 7% decrease or approximately 15% decrease in direct contact instructional minute time with our students. Well, our teachers currently are experiencing a much larger percentage of time where they’re not providing direct instruction for our students out of necessity for a bridge [during the pandemic]. Conditions are actually very appropriate for this transition now and to go from building these experiences in bridge synchronous and asynchronous identifying those essential standards go
A survey conducted as part of the school’s WASC accreditation process had the following questions and answers related to the 4x4 decision:

- 41 of the 52 respondents said they did not support the 4x4 bell schedule adoption for the 2021-2022 school year.
- 47 of the 52 respondents stated they did not feel the 4x4 bell schedule adoption was made collaboratively and transparently, with input from all stakeholders.

Teachers’ comments on this survey question stated:

“Absolutely not. The high school staff worked for more than a year to research possible improvements to our existing bell schedule, during which time the 4x4 option was quickly discarded, given that it was determined to not come close to meeting the actual needs of our students. In spite of this, and completely out of the blue, in May of 2020, the three district office leaders sent to the school board a 4x4 proposal for them to vote on. It was immediately approved, without ANY discussion, input, or buy-in from the teachers or the students. The 4x4 proposal, crafted by the district office, was deceitfully made to look like it was the result of all of the high school’s bell schedule research, but that could not have been further from the truth. It was a completely underhanded, dishonorable, and deceitful action on the part of the district office.”

“I believe that the high school administrators led teaching staff to believe that their opinion mattered, but in the end, the 4x4 schedule was going to be implemented no matter what the teaching staff’s opinion was.”

“No, In the more than 3 decades I have worked here, I have never seen such a poorly handled mess. To have Principal 1 and Vice Principal listen to staff and present a seven-period bell schedule to the board, to immediately having the Learning Department present a 4x4 which was “adopted” is bad enough. To have it done during a pandemic when schools were closed shows a lack of..."
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<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Teacher Letters to the Editor</td>
<td>The majority of the teachers in the school send letters to the editor in the local newspaper, organized by department, expressing their concerns about transitioning to a 4x4 schedule.</td>
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<td>“A major concern is the lack of time we will have to build relationships with students. Science can be a challenging subject to learn. Building personal relationships with students is what can help them get through the toughest content. We spend months getting to know each of our ~150 students. Creating these relationships takes months. Each day we strive to get to know each student while also guiding them through Science content. Students truly seem to feel comfortable in January or February. If we switch to a 4 x 4 schedule, these important relationships, which are always noted as a strength of our school site, will not be as easily built and students will be negatively impacted.”</td>
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<td>(Letters to the Local Paper, April 2021)</td>
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<td>April 2021</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>During this board meeting, there are a number of comments from the public regarding both concerns and support for the 4x4 schedule transition. Several teachers are also in attendance, expressing their concerns. Principal 1 and vice principal share a report about the transition including the rationale, the process followed to reach the decision, and the purported benefits the 4x4 schedule will bring, including addressing many of the concerns mentioned in the public comments. The board asks questions and expresses concern over teacher opposition to the reform. A board Member steps down to the podium and delivers a long speech in support of the 4x4. In the middle of his speech he communicates that they can either stop resisting the 4x4 or go work elsewhere. No action was taken in this meeting but it was decided to hold a special board meeting to discuss whether to rescind the 4x4 decision.</td>
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<td>May 2021</td>
<td>Special board meeting</td>
<td>“No participation, no collaboration, and no buy-in from the professional high school teaching staff on the four-by-four schedule proposal this last spring took place. Additionally, the manner in which this 4x4 adoption was somehow placed back on the table and prioritized by the district office after all discussions on that topic had ended many months prior, does not leave anyone with the perception that this process was honorable, honest, or transparent. With close to 1,000 years, I’ll say 700 years of collective SHS teaching experience and expertise at the disposal of the district for thoughtful and experience-based decision-making collaboration, there was a complete disregard for the value of our options, of our concerns, and our in-depth knowledge and understanding of the significant uniqueness of SHS and its treasured students’ needs.” (Teacher Leader of the Revolt, April 2021 board meeting)</td>
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|           |                        | During this Special board meeting, the only major item on the agenda was whether to rescind the previous (May 2020) decision to implement a 4x4 schedule. There was one hour and 25 minutes worth of comments from the audience and 3 hours and 11 minutes of discussion before voting. During the Discussion, a number of school and district administrators presented once more on the rationale and data supporting purported benefits of the 4x4 schedule while also continuing to address concerns brought up by the public comments. Ultimately, the board voted 3-2 to uphold the May 2020 decision and proceed with the implementation of the 4x4 schedule. The status quo will not move the needle for students. Going backwards will not move the needle for students. And a punt call at this point would be disastrous. Listen to your top educators and respect their professional experience. Know and trust the strategic student-centered vision for all of SUSD . . . When all decisions are made in the best interests of students, change and improvement are inevitable, and our students win. When decisions are made based on adults’ needs, students lose. Thank you very much and good luck. (Former board member, May 2021 board meeting) I have not heard anything tonight that dissuades me that this program will give rise to active learners, to students who can collaborate and create and work on interdisciplinary projects and prepare them for college should they wish to do that. And so I like the program,
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<td>August 2021</td>
<td>New principal</td>
<td>The principal of Sherford Middle School is promoted to become principal of Sherford High School and lead the implementation of the new 4x4 schedule. We will refer to her as Principal Two. “When asked for her thoughts on the 4×4 schedule . . . I’m glad that students will have access to an expanded course of study in both the core curricular and elective pathways as well as an opportunity to access more experiences and deepen their scope of knowledge . . . our students are lucky to have great teachers and a supportive staff to guide and champion them.” (Article in the Local Newspaper by Berk, 2021)</td>
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<td>October 2021</td>
<td>Instructional coach hired</td>
<td>The district hires an instructional coach to support teachers at Sherford High School.</td>
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| October 2021 | whole-staff survey on the transition supports needed | In October 2021, Principal 2 pushed out a survey to the whole staff to ascertain professional development needs related to the 4x4 transition. The survey asked teachers whether they still needed the following: 
  ● Visit to another school 
  ● Assessment Tools 
  ● Access to Curriculum 
  ● How to support students in an accelerated learning environment 
  ● Teaching strategies that are conducive to a 90 minute block 
  ● Lesson models 
  ● Examples of Pacing Guides 
  ● Is there something else that would be helpful? 
 There were 35 responses on the survey, but it is unclear whether any additional administrative actions followed to provide teachers with their reported needs. |
| September 2022 | Letter to the editor | “Now before you start calling me a conspiracy theorist, let’s look at the superintendent’s recent history. 2 years ago, [the] high school principal went against the wishes of |
95% of the teachers and backed the superintendent’s 4x4 plan. As a reward for his loyalty and since he’d lost the confidence of the teachers, the superintendent created the new position of Director of Special Programs and gave the job to the Principal. If that wasn’t bad enough, the district (and taxpayers) have to pay him an amount equal to his principal’s salary and benefits of $180,966, for a job that could be filled for probably half that amount. Are you, the taxpayer, ok with that?

These are just a few of the many reasons why I will not support any current or past board members or district employees. It’s time we elect School board members who will hold the administration accountable, who bring a fresh perspective and who aren’t ok with the status quo. It’s time we get back to academic excellence.”

Fall 2022  | Board election campaigning period  | Several candidates make getting rid of the 4x4 schedule one of their major campaign issues.

January 2023  | Board meeting  | One of the newly-elected board members puts forth a proposal to the board for a for the establishment of a Citizen Advisory Committee to conduct a 360 Degree Evaluation of the 4X4 Block Schedule at Sherford High School. Another board Member amended the proposal so that the committee would become a board Subcommittee with two board members in charge of guiding the process. This new proposal passed with a 4-1 vote.

At this same board meeting, there were some comments against sending teachers to an Equity conference: “Our schools are doing a tragic disservice to students by championing what has become a politicized concept of equity aimed at forcing equal outcome instead of equal opportunity for all students” (comment from an audience member).

February 2023  | 2 newspaper articles on equity  | Regarding how Equity is still a “hot button issue” for Sherford District as members of the public take issue with the district spending money to send teachers to an equity conference and also funding for an Equity Audit to take place later that spring. In a second article, one board member requests to add to a future board meeting a discussion to come up with a unified definition educational equity, which is not seconded by any other board member.

February 2023  | Newspaper article about shifting  | A local newspaper reports rising number of Hispanic students in the district. Some Hispanic students reported
### Demographics and Discrimination

Feeling victims of discrimination and racial slurs in the wake of the controversial athletic incident. One student added that some students are more accepting than others, but there are still racial tensions at the school and across the district.

February 2023

#### Subcommittee votes to keep their meetings closed to the public

A March newspaper article reported that in the February meeting, the committee voted to keep their meetings closed to the public as they are setting everything up. Of course, they are going to create forums for different stakeholder groups to come and give their opinion about the 4x4 schedule.

February 2023

#### Letters to the editor

One letter denounced the lack of transparency regarding closing the Subcommittee meetings to the public:

“The first meeting of the 4x4 committee was this afternoon, February 9. But community members were shut out of the meeting. At least one of the board member “overseers” was taken by surprise — as this committee was directed by the board to hold open meetings so that interested community members could attend and participate and learn along with the committee.

The committee did not have the authority to close the February 9 meeting, nor to deny public access to future meetings. If committee members do not want to hear from the public or answer questions, they should decline to serve. If the superintendent was behind the decision to close the meeting (and he was seen speaking to several committee members beforehand), then he overstepped his authority.

Why the secrecy? Why was there no public announcement of the date, time, or place of its first meeting? Why was there no disclosure from the district of who was selected to serve? Where is the promised transparency?

If the superintendent’s goal is to achieve public support for his educational programs, then input from parents and teachers should be welcomed, and he should not try to manipulate and control a committee’s findings. meetings need to be open, and information (unless it is confidential) needs to be made readily available to the public.”

February 2023

#### Letters to the editor

One letter questions whether SEL is going to be truly impactful: “The new board of Education and simply need to keep an eye on the evolution of the implementation of SEL. Is this another fad or is this indeed the road that will prove the best one for student achievement and outcomes? Time and research will
Two others address educational equity:

“The inability of various trustees and the superintendent to articulate a meaningful definition for Equity was a bit of a surprise . . . We must distance ourselves from the farcical idea that equity in education is “just about giving every student what they need” and have open conversations with the community about how best to reward achievement and leverage long-standing Individual Education Plans and 504 plans to bridge the gap. Let’s come together cast to the trash heap this misleading and divisive policy and work to restore the pride Sherford once had in our local schools”


“Do parents really want teachers concerning themselves with deconstructing traditional grading, solving the gender equation, or their child’s sexual orientation? The administration often justifies their bad ideas with “EDCOE says we have to do it” and the “safe, valued, respected” mantra and then outsources to people that know best. In this case a bunch of speakers who judge people based on their skin color and ethnicity and then ironically preach on antiracism and antibias.

The parents I know do not believe that “equity is love in action” (the title of this year’s conference) nor do they send them to school so that teachers can catalogue them to treat them differently based on their race, sex, socio-economic status, or faith.”

Yet another letter spoke of a lack of transparency in the district regarding the equity conference:

“superintendent declines to be transparent about who attended that annual Equity conference. In the interest of transparency, informing trustees, parents and taxpaying citizens of Sherford needs to be up front, complete and without secrecy. During these rapidly changing times in education, expedited transparency is required from educators, school administrators and state legislators to keep parents and guardians informed. In the name of Equity, too many children were denied knowledge of attaining Merit Scholarship status in other school districts. In the name of Equity, grading standards were changed, children were ordered with whom to sit during lunchtime and told what to discuss. Transparency is denied in closed societies. Too many generations of
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<td>March 2023</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>The board shared the names and contact information of the selected members of the 4x4 board Subcommittee as well as an overview of how they are going to seek feedback from all stakeholders.</td>
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<td>March 2023</td>
<td>March 2023</td>
<td>“I’ve been skeptical of it (the 4x4 schedule) and I was open to revising it or changing it . . . so where is the truth? Just because it hasn’t worked especially well for my family, how is it working for the community? So that was really the origin of the committee . . . I was the one who sort of spearheaded the creation of the committee to kind of review the new block schedule, which is of course the 4x4, and I think it was to make sure that we included and were listening to all of our stakeholder groups,” [and] he explained that the 4x4 schedule was an ever-present topic of conversation throughout his campaign, and it was high on his list of priorities once he was elected” New board Member.</td>
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| March 2023 | 4x4 schedule survey for teachers | The High School Administration pushed out a survey for teachers regarding how they felt about different aspects of the bell schedule, 2 years into implementation.  
- Most teachers agree they are able to complete essential course standards in each term (8.3% strongly agree, 45.8% agree, 20.8% neutral, 16.7 Disagree and 8.3% strongly disagree)  
- About half of the teachers feel students have sufficiently mastered course content required for the next courses.  
- Only about 38% of teachers feel their students have content depth of knowledge  
- About 33% of teachers report HW load was increased to adjust to the new schedule  
- 55% of teachers feel they are able to engage students for the full 87 minutes of class  
- 58% of teachers feel their experience of teaching in this arrangement is “good” or “great”  
- 55% of teachers feel the daily preparation time is beneficial to managing their workload  
- 70% of teachers feel that the term is NOT an adequate amount of time for building student connections |

2 a subcommittee of the board led by 5 community and parent leaders, each one appointed by a different board member, meant to gather feedback from all stakeholders to evaluate how the implementation of the new schedule was going
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| April 2023 | Article regarding athletic    | “As a team booster and parent of a player from the 2021 CIF Championship team, I have first-hand knowledge about [The controversial athletic incident]. Over the past 2 years, out of respect for the team, I have tried to avoid giving this unfortunate incident any additional oxygen. However, when I read that one line, I felt compelled to respond, “Not one of them did anything wrong?”

The two uniformed and rostered Varsity players who threw tortilla at the opposing coaches and players that night responded impulsively in the heat of the moment to an altercation at the end of the game.

Our head coach unfortunately bears much of the responsibility for the events that night. First, the person who brought the tortillas to the game, [said the] coach knew ahead of time that he was bringing tortillas to the game to celebrate. Both men failed to recognize the inherent peril in such an idea. Secondly, and more importantly, our head coach lost his cool at the end of the game and shouted profanity and insults at the other coaches and players. This caused a shouting and shoving match that led to two of our players to impulsively fling tortillas towards the approaching players and coaches.

Not one of them did anything wrong?

The writer’s failure to acknowledge that the boys made a
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<td>April 2023</td>
<td>Letters to the editor regarding “We the parents, Sherford”</td>
<td>“We the Parents Sherford does not claim to represent anyone’s views, except those of concerned parents who contact us when disturbed by policy or curriculum decisions made without public disclosure or comment. Several recent policy changes trouble parents and taxpayers, particularly legislation viewed as endangering the well-being of students. It is not correct to suggest We the Parents is a shadowy group. We are Sherford parents and grandparents. Many members of our group have lived in Sherford for decades and some have parents and grandparents who graduated from the high school. WTPS is committed to making sure an excellent education is available to Sherford students and does not want to get sidetracked by those who would attempt to attack and politicize our objectives.”</td>
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mistake is deeply disturbing. The tortillas they tossed landed on the visiting teams’ players and coaches. Publicly available video of the incident captured a parent or fan from the opposing team shouting. “They are throwing tortillas at us! Racists!”

Actions did in fact cause harm
While we all know that our players had no racist intent in their actions, clearly the impact of those actions were felt as racist by some in the moment. That matters. Our players’ regrettable actions did in fact cause harm.

As a community, we must acknowledge this uncomfortable truth. Our players have learned from their mistakes and have since competed honorably as Islanders.

However, the writer and We the Parents Sherford have deliberately chosen to continue to use this incident and our student-athletes in their never-ending culture wars against our school system.

The writer’s statement strongly suggests that both he and We the Parents Sherford believe that there is nothing wrong with throwing tortillas at players and coaches of a predominantly Hispanic/Latino team.

While our young players made mistakes in the heat of the moment, the writer has had nearly 2 years to get all his facts straight and his words right, and thus we must take his words at face value.

His statement is factually incorrect, ethnically insensitive, and appalling to most Sherfordites. His statement clearly implies that certain ethnic groups in our town are not deserving of safety or respect.”
Talking about the athletic incident:
A group of young men worked hard and earned a championship title.
Not one of them did anything wrong.
The wrong was all done by adults. One party-affiliated, politically active Sherford man set the team and the community up, and his actions resulted in national and international humiliation and ridicule.
Sherford’s sons were, without reflection or restraint, instantly publicly admonished in an official statement by the superintendent.
Far more egregiously, the board of Trustees, by then knowing the identity of the perpetrator, piled on with their infamous public condemnation of the Sherford community as “racist, classist and colorist.” Why? They were more concerned about constructing a politically correct façade for national media rather than finding the truth. When their own investigation proved they got it wrong, not a single trustee had the courage to admit it and offer the team, the student body and the Sherford Community the genuine apology they deserved.
Call it diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) or social emotional learning (SEL), all are purposeful efforts to teach children what to think rather than how to think. Political indoctrination has no place in public schools. Parents are responsible for their children’s moral formation and state schools should not be trying to override their influence and responsibility.
“We the Parents sympathizers merely exercise acceptable free speech when they shout down speakers at School board meetings and troll School board members. Book banning and curriculum meddling are just good parenting – not blatant censorship that would produce students as biased and narrow minded as their parents.
The Sherford We the Parents agenda and methods are not at all original with them. The Sherford branch derives from a nationwide, extremist, right-wing attempt to politicize school boards to energize their base to vote and recruit candidates for elections. And the tone of the editorial is also a Trump derivative. Never admit mistakes or take responsibility. Always attack and assume the victim role. Don’t be overly worried about getting the facts straight.
We the Parents is a misleading name – you are not representative of the majority of parents in Sherford as
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| April 2023 | Article and letter to the editor about school board controversy regarding LGBTQIA+ training | proven by the compelling results of the recent school election. In our democracy, your minority views and rights must be respected, but you mustn’t be allowed to disrupt the education of our children, for political purposes, through bluff, bullying, and rewriting history.”

“[The battle in Sherford is playing out in the rest of the country where conservatives have engaged in culture wars with local school boards.”]

“The hateful homophobia in board meetings seeps into our learning environments and makes students, staff and families feel unsafe. Students cannot learn when they feel unsafe, and educators cannot perform at their best, thereby bringing down the academic performance of all . . . It is crucial for the health of our school system, and for civil discourse in our community, that sensible and responsible citizens make a point of attending our school board meetings. Only then will it be clear that the extremists who constitute “We the Parents” are a fringe minority, not at all representatives of our community, and undeserving of any major say in how our schools are run. Sherford voters must remain vigilant in keeping partisan politics out of our School board and out of our schools.

“The community is owed complete awareness of the shifting content presented to Sherford’s children. I thought nothing could be bizarre enough to surprise me. I was wrong . . . Honest, intelligent people recognize the negative impact of COVID-19 lock-downs on student achievement - as slipping CAASPP test scores verify - has been enormous. Yet, what is the unambiguous priority of the “experts” in Sacramento leading our public schools? It is usurping the role of parents for the purposes of becoming the authoritative agents for sexualizing children. Parents statewide have not been shy or silent in opposition to hyper-sexualized education for their children in public schools. Are California’s school administrators deaf? Are they blind? Illiterate?..While I was pleased to recently learn that after being made aware of the conference agenda Sherford District leadership has promised to not send any Sherford employees, we must remain ever vigilant in the protection of the innocence of our youth. It is our greatest responsibility as parents, one which we should never abdicate to the public school system or their overlords.”
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<td>May 2023</td>
<td>Letter to the editor expressing concerns about instructional minutes</td>
<td>“Under the current 4x4 schedule, about 50% of the students are taking three classes instead of four classes therefore only getting 4.5 hours of daily instruction instead of six. How is that in their best interest? That is something I have asked the superintendent, the Director of Learning and the Principal, and not one of them has been able to explain how that is in THEIR best interest. I don’t blame the kids. What teenager, given the option, wouldn’t choose a lighter load? I blame the administration. When 4x4 was approved, 97% of the teachers were against it. So you have to ask, then why would they adopt it? Nationwide, California schools are ranked 44th, so how is less in-class instruction supposed to help?”</td>
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| April and  | Several letters to the editor regarding tensions about opinions expressed at board meetings | “Those presenting this information to the board on Thursday night asked school board members if they were aware of this event, if district funds supported the ACSA, and if anyone was planning on attending. They both said they hoped Sherford’s school administrators and school board members would focus more on academics (and not as much on gender division). Following their presentations, a few individuals stood up and expressed their outrage at the “vitriol” and “homophobia” expressed by “some members” of the community. I was stunned by these accusations. If you look at the video recording of the board meeting, you too will see that the ACSA conference details (found on the website) were merely copied and shared with board members and that the presenters uttered no homophobic or vitriolic comments. I am very concerned that so many people seem to believe that it is acceptable to condemn and vilify anyone they think does not agree with them. Differences of opinion are a part of life and should be explored— so long as the focus remains on the issues and the discussion does not degenerate into personal attacks. Especially in the context of public education, the goal should be to build bridges of understanding, and this will not occur until everyone is committed to kind, respectful and honest discourse.” “We are blessed with many opportunities to let our views be known on important subjects for us and our community. Unfortunately, from public meetings I have attended -
two of them in the past week, it is clear that the wheels are coming off! Raw emotion, fear mongering and scurrilous attacks on individuals and groups are not the way to persuade people.

Under the guise of public comment and free speech, such discourse has become routine. Public servants and officials trying to do their jobs for us should not have to endure such behavior and it is often directed at them!”

“I am generally not the sort of person inclined to speak at school board meetings. But last week, on the spur of the moment, I felt compelled to take the microphone to rebut a barrage of hateful anti-LGBTQ comments made by several other people in the audience.

These speakers parroted the nationwide effort by right-wing extremists to make gender and sexual issues the most prominent topic at local school board meetings.

This cynical and sinister politicization of education adds to the considerable difficulties LGBTQ youth already experience and provides an open invitation to bullying . . .

We must oppose the normalization of hate speech. We cannot permit a small minority of radical bigots to control our educational agenda. We must protect all our children and model toleration and sensitivity.”

“[She] presumes to be superior to anyone who disagrees with her political POV that she is entitled to call them ignorant, pawns, biased gay bashers, and childish . . . it seems to have become common for those with a liberal political agenda to think they can diagnose other with whom they disagree as afflicted with all manners of phobias and mental disorders . . . With no proof, [she] and others claim those with whom they disagree are part of some national agenda to end public school education. Quite the opposite is true. Good academically focused, safe public school education is vital to the wellbeing of all children and the country . . . No one person, political club or group represents all of Sherford’s citizens. I believe we can all use civil, respectful language in our comments without derogatory name calling.”

“Please, for civility’s sake, let us discuss ideas, not denounce people. Adults need no protection from ideas. Cowardly smokescreens, “-phobic” suffixed slurs, substituting the pejorative “hate” for “disagreement” and suicidal doomsaying do not promote civil discourse, they prevent it. Stop using them. Stop pretending they
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| May 11, 2023 | Newspaper article about 4x4 Subcommitte member who decides to leave the committee | “He left the group on May 2, after advocating for change and accountability among district leadership . . . he said the committee was stacked with people who are not willing to challenge the district, and it had a number of poorly attended public forums, except for the faculty feedback session”.  

The former committee member also cited differences with other members of the committee who “accused him of wanting to use it as a springboard to run for office in 2 years.”  

The article summarizes that the 4x4 had been an important campaign issue in the previous school board elections in the Fall 2022.  

The former committee member also reported that “no changes, upgrades, or teacher training have happened since implementation . . . [and that] math teachers report...
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<td>May 2023</td>
<td>Board meeting</td>
<td>High school staff presents a historical overview of the 4x4 transition timeline, district guiding principles, professional development, student/staff survey results, and current data trends regarding the impact of the new bell schedule on student learning, access, and flexibility. The 4x4 board Subcommittee presents their report with findings from their evaluation process. “I think it’s worth addressing that for me, I did not hear the sort of groundswell of opposition that would be necessary to make such a drastic change (going back to the old schedule), and I do value the input from various stakeholders that it would be disruptive to go back. I absolutely agree with keeping an open mind and I think that what we all need to do now is to the best of our extent possible, we need to make this current schedule work as best as we can” (board Member, comment at the end of this report)</td>
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<td>May 20, 2023</td>
<td>Opinion piece in local newspaper</td>
<td>“A small but vocal and influential group is attempting to politicize our school system and polarize our community. This has nothing to do with psychiatry and everything to do with bigotry, a denial of history, and a lack of civility. Their attitudes and actions threaten the integrity of our school system and the stability of our community. . . . Making a big fuss about LGBTQ issues and denying America’s shameful racial history is not a home-grown strategy. It is an outgrowth of Steve Bannon’s openly stated national plan to politicize school boards with culture war memes to win votes . . .The lack of civility in our community has an improved considerably since the recent School board election. Because extremist candidates lost, we now have a solid majority of reasonable people representing the moderate majority who are eager to fulfill their educational role unimpeded by partisan politics. Previously, school board meetings were repeatedly disrupted by raucous demonstrations and individual school board members were subjected to crude and cruel intimidation. We must let our school board focus on the real educational needs of our kids not be distracted by political dirty tricks.” Op-Ed by two Parents affiliated with the school.</td>
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<td>May 25, 2023</td>
<td>Newspaper about findings from the board</td>
<td>This article summarized the District’s board presentation on the history of the 4x4, why it was implemented and all its benefits. The article also summarized the 4x4</td>
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<td>Subcommittee</td>
<td>Subcommittee’s findings, including:</td>
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<td>● The majority of the students stated that the new bell schedule worked well for them because they could focus more on fewer classes. They are enjoying the flexibility and feel that teachers are improving how they adjust pacing of course content.</td>
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<td>● Students are concerned about having such long class periods with too much material being covered each day.</td>
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<td>● Students are also concerned about their AP classes.</td>
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<td>● Students reported the transition to the schedule was not well explained to them.</td>
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<td>● Parents also felt that having fewer classes was beneficial for their kids.</td>
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<td>● Parents felt positive about increased options for courses, more opportunities for remediation and benefits to kids with IEPs and 504s.</td>
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<td>● Parents are also concerned about the fast pace, AP classes and the length of class periods being too long.</td>
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<td>● Teachers had a positive view of teaching fewer classes and felt their workload was more manageable.</td>
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<td>● Teachers felt the longer class periods were beneficial for some subjects.</td>
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<td>● Teachers felt that remediation opportunities were helping to reduce the number of Ds and Fs.</td>
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<td>● Teachers’ concerns centered around the decreased time for student connections, decreased time for indepth instruction and the exhaustion from the fast pace.</td>
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<td>The subcommittee’s main takeaways were that:</td>
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<td>● The timing and roll out of the schedule caused some stakeholders to be confused and feel unheard.</td>
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<td>● “While the majority of students and parents feel the new schedule is working positively for them, a sizable number of stakeholders including faculty still feel modifications need to be made. Another observation was that although some stakeholders still feel modifications are needed, they do not support reverting back to the old schedule.”</td>
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<td>The committee’s recommendations included</td>
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<td>● Offer year-long blocks for select courses; continue refinement for AP test preparation including spring study sessions;</td>
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<td>● consider starting the school year a week earlier to improve scheduling conflicts between holidays and finals;</td>
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<td>● continue monitoring and evaluating the 4x4 schedule for</td>
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| May 26, 2023 | Newspaper article about findings from the board subcommittee | A newspaper article summarizes the board Subcommittee’s findings regarding the 4x4 schedule.  
Board subcommittee conducted about 60 hours of meetings, feedback sessions, public forums and survey preparation to gather stakeholder feedback on the 4x4 schedule.  
In addition, 25 faculty, 20 parents, and 25 students attended in person sessions, while 34 faculty, 480 parents and 125 students provided survey responses across four surveys, two for parents, one for staff and one for students.  
Major recommendations from the Subcommittee included:  
  ● Start the school year earlier in the summer  
  ● Provide training and support to faculty  
  ● Empower parents to participate in the course selection and planning process for their kids  
During the public comments at the board meeting, parents had lingering concerns about the instructional minutes and reported that 59% of the students are not taking the full 8 courses afforded by the schedule. Another parent pointed out that 48% of the parents and 65% of the teachers don’t agree that the 4x4 schedule has helped students better understand or retain material. There were also parent concerns about increased HW load and one board member was concerned about 42% of the students reporting they have trouble getting the classes they want. |
| May 29, 2023 | Letter to the newspaper                    | A community member writes an opinion piece citing several pieces of data from the 4x4 board Subcommittee’s report calling for a “remedy” to the 4x4 schedule. In her letter, she concludes: “This study points out specific weaknesses that must be addressed and corrected — hopefully before the next school year. [The superintendent] brought this 4x4 bell schedule to Sherford; now it is essential that he fix it to meet the educational needs of Sherford’s high school students. |
| November 2023 | High school report to the board            | The high school reports most recent data and compares it to historical data to understand changes and growth since the implementation of the 4x4 schedule. |
April 11, 2023

Maylen Rafiul

Sch of Leadership & Ed Science

Re: Modification - IRB-2023-250 Professional Development as a Key Ingredient of Structural School Reforms: The Case of Schedule Changes

Dear Maylen Rafiul:

The University of San Diego Institutional Review Board (USD IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-2023-250: Professional Development as a Key Ingredient of Structural School Reforms: The Case of Schedule Changes.

Decision: Approved

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Findings: Modification is approved, changing study protocols and updating recruitment documents + consent/assent forms to comply with the new study protocols.

Research Notes: N/A

Internal Notes:

The USD IRB requires annual renewal of all active studies reviewed and approved by the IRB. Please submit an application for renewal prior to the annual anniversary date of initial study approval. If an application for renewal is not received, the study will be administratively closed.

Note: We send IRB correspondence regarding student research to the faculty advisor, who bears the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research. We request that the faculty advisor share this correspondence with the student researcher.

Applications for full review must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the next scheduled monthly IRB meeting; see https://www.sandiego.edu/irb/updates/ for specific deadlines. You may submit an IRB application for expedited or exempt review at any time.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Truc T. Ngo, PhD
IRB Administrator

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