

Liberty University

School of Music

**Choral Educators' Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools**

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the Faculty of the School of Music  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Music Education

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to identify how common the practice of block scheduling is currently among American public middle schools. This study also determines the perspectives of choral music educators working in public middle schools with existing block schedules. More extant literature is needed to examine block scheduling practices at the middle school level and the possible effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs. Such an examination is essential for ascertaining curriculum needs, staffing issues, scheduling challenges, and choral music education advocacy initiatives. A qualitative design and case study approach are utilized to infer connections between block scheduling challenges and staffing needs. Data is collected through an electronic survey instrument disseminated to choral music educators who are National Association for Music Education (NAfME) members. The online survey consists of ten questions designed to examine individual perspectives on block scheduling and its effects on choral music programs. The survey includes a request for ten volunteers with experience with middle school block schedules to participate in a telephone interview to further explore strategies and perceived challenges. Results determine that block scheduling potentially has a positive effect on programs served by full-time educators and a negative effect on programs administered by itinerant educators. The implications of these results indicate a need for further study in scheduling practices and proactive advocacy initiatives.

*Keywords:* block scheduling, curriculum design, music education, choral music education, middle school choral programs, student retention, advocacy, itinerant music educator

## Dedication

This study is dedicated to my amazing husband David, my beloved parents, and my family, who have all been a valued part of my life and have been unwaveringly faithful and supportive throughout each step of this journey.

To my dear friends, who encouraged me to stay the course and finish this work, and for their love and laughter along the way.

To all of my teachers throughout my academic journey, especially Dr. Jerry Newman and Dr. Stanley Harris, who served on my thesis committee. Thank you for your compassion, humor, unwavering encouragement, and inspiration. Thank you for reflecting God's grace toward me when I needed it the most.

To my students, especially those who never sat in a regular class period with me, and yet joined me in passing God's gift of music on to others and sharing in the joy of music-making: thank you for teaching me how to be the educator I am today. My love to you always.

And, lastly, I dedicate this work to my Father, the Lord God Almighty, who guides me each day and provides me with strength of mind and a grace that never diminishes. All of this work, and myself, I give to you, Lord. Soli Deo Gloria.

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## **Abbreviations**

**ESEA:** Elementary and Secondary Education Act

**ESSA:** Every Student Succeeds Act

**PA:** Participant A

**PB:** Participant B

**NA/ME:** National Association for Music Education

**SAT:** Scholastic Aptitude Test

**SES:** Socioeconomic status

**SRME:** Society for Research in Music Education

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

This chapter explores the possible impact of block scheduling on middle school choral programs. The desire to be academically competitive arose during the Cold War, and school reform in the United States became urgent. As one author put it, “with the furor caused by the Sputnik launch in 1957 and the concern that high school students were not prepared with enough ‘hard subjects,’ school reform was at the forefront to ensure the international competitiveness of U.S. high school students.”<sup>1</sup> School reform practices included the examination of the efficacy of class scheduling. How much time students needed to study a particular subject became a critical factor in determining academic success. While block scheduling has been a widespread practice at the high school level in the United States for the past thirty years, this scheduling is relatively new at the middle school level and is becoming increasingly common. Changes in scheduling can impact arts programs, and this chapter addresses the possibility of positive and negative outcomes for middle school choral programs.

### **School Reform in the United States**

School reform has been a consistent topic of debate in the United States throughout the history of American public education. Still, the push to become a technologically advanced society and the need for an educational system to support it began in earnest in the 1960s with the Space Race. After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, the United States government enacted several domestic initiatives, including the passage of the National Defense Education

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<sup>1</sup> Sally J. Zepeda and R. Stewart Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", *Review of Educational Research* 76, no. 1 (2006): 139.

Act.<sup>2</sup> One of the most critical studies published from such task forces occurred in 1983. *A Nation at Risk*, published under the Reagan administration by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, presented a harsh critical analysis of the state of American public education.<sup>3</sup> Since its first publication, *A Nation at Risk* has inspired the production of more than fifty additional reports.<sup>4</sup> The main issues it addressed were the following: content, expectations, time, and delivery.”<sup>5</sup>

*A Nation at Risk* found that American students could have competed more effectively with students from other nations regarding time spent on homework and in class. Although not a new subject in public school reform, researchers ascertained that the time spent on tasks was used ineffectively, and schools needed to appropriately develop student time management skills. Proposed changes to school schedules to improve this issue included lengthening the school day, lengthening the school year, or improving the efficacy of the schedule of the current school day.<sup>6</sup> Researchers began to question the effectiveness of traditional programs, like the six- or seven-period school day, and how student engagement and achievement could be improved through more extended periods of study of fewer subjects.

Under the Bush administration, the National Education Goals were established in 1990. The eight goals developed by President George H.W. Bush and state governors would be

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Senate, “Sputnik Spurs Passage of the National Defense Education Act”, [https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Sputnik\\_Spurs\\_Passage\\_of\\_National\\_Defense\\_Education\\_Act.htm](https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Sputnik_Spurs_Passage_of_National_Defense_Education_Act.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Eric A. Hanushek and Dale W. Jorgenson, Ed., *Improving America’s Schools: The Role of Incentives*, (Washington, D.C: National Academy Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> David Karl Carpenter, *Block Scheduling Implementation in Secondary School Music Programs in Louisiana*, (PhD diss., The University of Southern Mississippi, 2001), 5, ProQuest (AAT 3013756), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

codified into law under the Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994 by the Clinton administration. The eight goals outlined in the law are:

1. All children in America will begin school ready to learn.<sup>7</sup>
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.<sup>8</sup>
3. American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, arts, foreign languages, civics, and government, economics, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.<sup>9</sup>
4. By 2000, American educators will have access to professional development to improve their professional skills and cultivate skills necessary for student preparation and teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom.<sup>10</sup>
5. United States students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.<sup>11</sup>
6. Every American adult will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.<sup>12</sup>
7. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Metric Association, “Goals 2000: Educate America Act”, last updated 2022, <https://usma.org/laws-and-bills/goals-2000-educate-america-act>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

8. American public schools will cultivate positive relationships with parents and the community, increasing parental involvement, communication, and participation.<sup>14</sup>

While the Goals 2000 law does not explicitly mention time or scheduling, the third goal comes close by determining that students should be able to demonstrate proficiency in the named subject areas.<sup>15</sup> What Goals 2000 accomplished more than anything was to identify primary weaknesses in the American public education system. More importantly, what evolved from Goals 2000 was the reformation of the ESEA, or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, into what would become known as the No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB would launch the emphasis on standards-based testing and encourage the development of alternative scheduling practices.

### **Block Scheduling**

School divisions have experimented with various scheduling techniques for decades, beginning in the 1980s. The 4x4 block schedule, modeled after traditional college scheduling practices, is a popular practice still presently in use. However, the concept of high school block scheduling is based on the philosophy of middle school education developed in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> The middle school philosophy is centered on the need for specialized schooling, which most benefits the diverse, changing needs of children ages 10-15, a unique

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Metric Association, "Goals 2000: Educate America Act", last updated 2022, <https://usma.org/laws-and-bills/goals-2000-educate-america-act>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Carpenter, *Block Scheduling Implementation in Secondary School Music Programs in Louisiana*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Hook, "Block Scheduling and its Effect on Secondary-School Music Performance Classes", *The Choral Journal* 36, no. 4 (1995): 27.

period in children’s physical, emotional, and mental development.<sup>17</sup> Benham describes the primary reasoning behind the middle school concept as “a process, a support system, and a curriculum focused on student-centered decision-making.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than moving from block of study to block of study, as students do in high school classes, at the middle school level, there is more emphasis on cooperative learning groups, such practice addresses multiple subjects within a given lesson that has an overarching theme or concept to be learned.

The concept of block scheduling was invented to support such needs. Ellerbrock et al. observe that “most schools still organize time around either uniform daily periods, usually six to seven periods of 45–55 min, extended time periods of 90 min with only four courses per day, often referred to as block scheduling or some combination of short periods and extended periods in the school day.”<sup>19</sup> The theory is that extended periods, or blocks, allow teachers to employ various educational strategies to increase student engagement and achievement.<sup>20</sup> Block scheduling, in short, is used to increase student engagement and “time on task” by lengthening the time classes meet each day.<sup>21</sup>

More extended class periods also allow districts to “emphasize certain curricular areas to improve test scores,” which can negatively impact the scheduling of other subjects considered

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<sup>17</sup> Cheryl Ellerbrock, Katherine Main, Kristina Falbe, and Dana Pomykal Franz, "An Examination of Middle School Organizational Structures in the United States and Australia", *Education Sciences* 8, no. 4 (2018): 168, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1201001.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> John Benham, *Music Advocacy: Moving from Survival to Vision*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011), 87.

<sup>19</sup> Ellerbrock et al., “An Examination of Middle School Organizational Structures in the United States and Australia”, 168.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Benham, *Music Advocacy*, 112.

“less important.”<sup>22</sup> Additional advantages, noted by Robert Lynn Canady and Michael Rettig, include having more time for students with longer learning processes and more time for cooperative learning.<sup>23</sup> American public high schools began implementing block scheduling in the early 1990s. “The Education Council Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-62) established the National Education Commission on Time and Learning. This act called for a comprehensive revision of the current emphasis on time and learning.”<sup>24</sup>

The 4x4 block, modeled after traditional college course schedules, allows students to take more courses during their high school career and provides space for remediation. For example, a student experiencing difficulty in math may be placed in Algebra but take the course in two parts: one in the fall and one in the spring semesters. David Carpenter states that one in ten American high schools was using some form of block scheduling by 1996.<sup>25</sup> By the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, block scheduling has become a more commonly used schedule in high schools along with traditional six- or seven-period schedules.

The potential for more extended class periods under block scheduling at the middle school level may allow full-time choral educators to implement more diverse teaching methods. Full-time choral educators will have greater flexibility in curriculum development and the ability to teach learning standards in greater detail. The extended block of time can also allow for studying a more comprehensive range of choral repertoire and provide space for remediation

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<sup>22</sup> Benham, *Music Advocacy*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig, *Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools*. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Carpenter, *Block Scheduling Implementation in Secondary School Music Programs in Louisiana*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

when needed.<sup>26</sup> Carpenter found that a common perception among music educators was that block scheduling played a role in “increasing the level of student performance.”<sup>27</sup> One of the primary purposes of block scheduling is to increase content coverage by spending more time on one subject versus moving frequently from one class to another, such as in traditional six- or seven-period class schedules, which encourages a fragmented feeling for students<sup>28</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

Block scheduling in high schools has documented various effects on performing arts ensembles. In the late 1990s, the National Association for Music Education reported block scheduling as the primary concern among American public school music educators.<sup>29</sup> The problem was justified for some, as schools with itinerant educators witnessed the most significant impact on music classes, mainly performing arts ensembles.

Small schools often share educators with other schools, thus reducing staff availability to teach multiple class sections. A common issue, identified by Mara Culp and Matthew Clauhs, who quote Daniel Isbell, states that “scheduling problems can manifest in small schools due to the schools’ inability to offer classes in multiple time slots.”<sup>30</sup> If there is no staff present to teach the section, the class cannot then be offered. Baker supports the theory that block scheduling has hurt high school performing arts ensembles, citing evidence from several studies that indicate

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<sup>26</sup> King, "On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses", 23.

<sup>27</sup> Carpenter, *Block Scheduling Implementation in Secondary School Music Programs in Louisiana*, 97.

<sup>28</sup> Zepeda and Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", 140.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Mara E. Culp and Matthew Clauhs, "Factors that Affect Participation in Secondary School Music: Reducing Barriers and Increasing Access", *Music Educators Journal* 106, no. 4 (2020): 46.



increased attrition has occurred as a direct result of block scheduling.<sup>31</sup> Eliot Merenbloom and Barbara Kelina define the underlying methodology which presents challenges for choral programs: “Two major segments comprise the middle school program of studies: core and encore or exploratory. Typically, the core includes English, social studies, mathematics, and science; encore or exploratory includes art, music, physical education, technology, health, and family and consumer sciences.”<sup>32</sup>

The existing literature exploring the effects on middle school choral curriculums needs to be more extensive. As a result, the impact of block scheduling on middle school choral programs must be determined. Equitable access to music programs is a potential issue for many schools nationwide. Identifying possible challenges and advantages related to scheduling may be helpful for current and future educators.<sup>33</sup> Block scheduling can create difficulties for student access to music programs. It can also enable students access to music classes. Since the study is qualitative and the researcher is a current middle school choral educator, the researcher’s perspective is included in the introduction of this thesis.<sup>34</sup>

### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to determine the perceived effects, both positive and negative, of block scheduling on middle school choral programs.

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<sup>31</sup> Vicki D. Baker, “Scheduling Accommodations Among Students Who Persist in High School Music Ensembles”, *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 18, no. 2 (April 2009): 8.

<sup>32</sup> Elliot Y. Merenbloom and Barbara A. Kalina, *Making Creative Schedules Work in Middle and High Schools*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin C. Helton and Allison M. Paetz, "Equity of Music Access and Enrollment in Ohio Secondary Schools", *Contributions to Music Education* 46, (2021): 181.

<sup>34</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 104.

Individual educator perspectives collected from the survey and interview process provided insight into the experiences of choral educators with block scheduling at the middle school level. This information was used to cultivate recommendations for further research, share choral educator experiences in curriculum development based on varying class meeting methods, and develop an advocacy plan for those facing possible school schedule challenges. As there needs to be more previous research in the specific area of middle school block scheduling and its effects on middle school choral programs, this study will add further investigation to the existing literature and contribute to subject resources for educators. The study will also contribute to the increasing knowledge about block scheduling and its influence on American public education.

#### Significance of the Study

The research currently available on the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs is less common than research that can be found on the perceived impact of block scheduling on high school choral programs. The information gathered in this study will assist future researchers and provide possible methods for improving scheduling practices and supporting the growth and retention of middle school choral programs. The shared perspectives of experienced educators may also be helpful for future educators in maximizing the possible benefits block scheduling may present for middle school choral programs.

High school music programs have already determined possible challenges, as identified by Thomas Connors:

Preliminary studies by Hall (1992) and Miles/Waa (1994) indicate a significant decrease of student participation in performing arts programs as a result of block scheduling being implemented. It would appear that the reduced number of daily course slots available to students, combined with the increasing demands for a greater number of graduation requirements, as well as more time devoted to core academic courses have made it more

difficult for students to remain involved with performing arts classes throughout their high school tenure.<sup>35</sup>

Block scheduling originated at the middle school level as a concept, but the specific usage of the 4x4 block, an influence of high school and college practices, is becoming increasingly common. The final question of the impact of block scheduling at the high school level still needs to be answered. It may also apply to similar practice implementation at the middle school level.<sup>36</sup> Many factors exist between student achievement and engagement and scheduling practices. The widespread use of block scheduling at the high school level indicates a belief that more extended study periods support student success.<sup>37</sup> The current study aimed to identify any similar challenges faced at the middle school level and provide potential solutions.

The experiences of choral educators working in a block scheduling environment can provide insight into addressing issues at other schools. For those needing guidance in developing curricula that make efficient use of the extended time, the strategies employed by others can aid in structuring “activities into a well-sequenced, smoothly flowing whole, which can promote conceptual, psychomotor, and aesthetic learning.”<sup>38</sup> Open communication with guidance counselors, administrators, and educational leaders will assist with developing schedules that provide students with equitable access to music education. Chad West substantiates the claim that music is a beneficial topic of study, stating that As one source said, “according to a Gallup (2003) poll, 95 percent of Americans believe that music is a key component of a well-rounded

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas N. Connors, *A survey of block scheduling implementation in the Florida public secondary schools and its effect on band programs*, Ph.D. diss., (The Florida State University, 1997), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Carpenter, *Block scheduling implementation in secondary school music programs in Louisiana*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ellerbrock et al., “An Examination of Middle School Organizational Structures in the United States and Australia”, 168.

<sup>38</sup> Zepeda and Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", 24.

education, and more than 75 percent believe that schools should mandate music education.”<sup>39</sup> It is possible to have support and provide a quality music education for all students if all stakeholders can find common ground on which to work.

#### Research Question and Sub Questions

School reform and class scheduling, particularly at the secondary level, is a topic that has been discussed previously in the United States. The flexible modular schedule of the 1950s and 1960s gave way to more structured practices in the 1980s and 1990s, thanks to a call for reform initiated by the Reagan administration.<sup>40</sup> A report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, proposed sweeping changes to the public education system, emphasizing high school education practices.<sup>41</sup> By the 1990s, block scheduling methods became the norm in American public high schools and substantially impacted music education.

Much debate has occurred about the effects of block scheduling on music education, particularly on ensemble participation. Some results have been positive: extended study periods present more significant opportunities to explore National and State Standards of Learning that were either previously neglected or eliminated from the curriculum due to time constraints.<sup>42</sup> Some of the effects of block scheduling have been negative, including reduced access to music

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<sup>39</sup> Chad West, "Teaching music in an era of high-stakes testing and budget reductions", *Arts Education Policy Review* 113, no. 2 (2012): 75.

<sup>40</sup> Sally J. Zepeda and R. Stewart Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", *Review of Educational Research* 76, no. 1 (2006), 139.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Carl D. King, "On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses", *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 7, no. 2 (1998), 22.

appreciation and performing ensemble classes due to graduation and college requirements.<sup>43</sup>

Beginning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, block scheduling has also become a practice at the middle school level. However, what effects, if any, on middle school performing ensembles have yet to be analyzed. As an exploration into what products block scheduling may enact on middle school choral music programs, this study will attempt to answer the following questions:

Research Question One: How common is block scheduling at the middle school level?

Research Question Two: What are the perceived adverse effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

Research Question Three: What are the perceived positive effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

Research Question Four: What strategies could be implemented to correct the adverse effects of block scheduling on middle school programs, and what methods exist for supporting healthy retention and growth?

### Conceptual Framework

Student engagement, retention, and equitable access to choral music education in middle school are the core concepts of this study. This study uses current choral educators' perspectives on the effects of block scheduling, both positive and negative, as well as the relevant literature, to provide a critical examination of potential benefits as well as identify areas where advocacy may be needed to promote the growth and maintenance of middle school choral ensembles. One of the purposes of the middle school concept is to encourage student autonomy and identity development.<sup>44</sup> If students are not provided equitable access to music education, such a purpose

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<sup>43</sup> King, "On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses", 23.

<sup>44</sup> Stephanie Cronenberg, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of General Music as a Required Middle Level Course", *RMLE Online: Research in Middle Level Education* 43, no. 9 (2020), 2.

is diminished. Allen J. Queen uses research by others to further identify the middle school concept as “the task” of protecting, nurturing, counseling, and teaching “individuals at this unique stage of life.”<sup>45</sup> By studying the effects of block scheduling on the availability of arts programs, it will be possible to determine flaws in the scheduling process. Cronenberg observes,

[w]hether a course is offered, how it is offered, to whom it is offered, whether it is required or optional, and how the course is labeled create a tangle of competing demands within a middle level school community. Although often made at the administrative level, curricular decisions directly affect the experience of both the students and the teachers.”<sup>46</sup>

The study will adopt a phenomenological approach and address issues of validity that may arise due to possible researcher bias to establish the perceived effects of block scheduling on student engagement, retention, and equitable access to choral music education in middle school. Conway notes:

A true phenomenological study is concerned with the essence or structure of the experience or phenomenon *and* uses phenomenological analytical processes to determine this structure, all with the understandings that come with exploring the researcher’s own bias and perspective in the process.<sup>47</sup>

Using phenomenological inquiry, the researcher for the current study used interviews and observations to examine choral educators’ perceptions of block scheduling. Conway quotes Cochran-Smith and Lytle: “If knowledge about teaching is ‘fluid and socially constructed,’ then we have a great deal to learn from teachers’ lived experiences.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Allen J. Queen, *The Block Scheduling Handbook*, Second ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, a SAGE Company, 2013), 63.

<sup>46</sup> Cronenberg, “Music Teachers’ Perceptions of General Music as a Required Middle Level Course”, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Colleen Conway, ed., *Approaches to Qualitative Research: An Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research in American Music Education, Volume 1*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 112.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

## Definition of Terms

**4x4 block scheduling: “Semester (4 x 4) block schedule:** A teaching schedule that enrolls students in four courses with class schedules of approximately 90 minutes each school day for 90 calendar days. Within this schedule, students can complete eight courses in 1 year.”<sup>49</sup>

**A/B block scheduling:** “Alternate day schedules” or schedules that alternate class periods within the day or week. Classes meet every other day for extended periods.<sup>50</sup> Class meetings every other day may also change from week to week. For example, “A” week may have first, third, and seventh blocks meeting Monday/Wednesday/Friday, and “B” week may only have the same classes meeting Tuesday/Thursday. The fifth period could be a shorter class block and meet daily; the second and sixth blocks follow the alternate schedule.

**Advocacy:** For this study, the term advocacy will be directly related to actions that defend and promote the value of music education.<sup>51</sup>

**Block scheduling:** A school scheduling model that extends individual class meeting times and reduces the number of classes students attend daily. The concept was introduced to maximize student contact time and provide space for differentiated instruction.<sup>52</sup>

**Constructivism:** A learning theory in which learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning through personal experiences, rather than through passive transmission of content from teacher to student.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Kay Norton, *A Study of the Impact of Block Scheduling on Student Academic Achievement in Public High Schools*, (PhD diss., ProQuest LLC 789 East Eisenhower Parkway, PO Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, 2010), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Queen, *The Block Scheduling Handbook*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Benham, *Music Advocacy*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Brent Reid, “School Schedules: 6 Types You Should Know About”, *Education Advanced*, November 19, 2011, <https://educationadvanced.com/resources/blog/school-schedules-6-types-you-should-know-about/>.

**Cooperative learning**: Students work together in small groups on an assigned, structured activity but are assessed individually on their contribution to the group’s product and work.<sup>54</sup>

**Curriculum**: The content and specifications of a course or program of study.<sup>55</sup>

**Differentiation**: Instruction that acknowledges and allows for varying student learning by incorporating multiple assessment strategies. By varying the instructional delivery methods, the teacher improves student learning outcomes.<sup>56</sup>

**Drop Schedule**: A rotating drop schedule may have as many as eight class periods, but students only attend five/six periods per day<sup>57</sup>

**Epoché**: To suspend judgment.<sup>58</sup>

**Itinerant teacher**: Itinerant is defined as “traveling from place to place.”<sup>59</sup>

**Flex Scheduling**: Class scheduling that is formatted to the student’s particular need. Courses can last for a few short weeks rather than year-long, quarterly, or by semester.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>53</sup> R. Narayan, C. Rodriguez, J. Araujo, A. Shaqlaih, and G. Moss, “Constructivism—Constructivist learning theory”, *The handbook of educational theories*, (Charlotte, NC: IAP Information Age Publishing, 2013), 169.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Wallace, *A Dictionary of Education*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), DOI:10.1093/acref/9780199679393.001.0001.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Enriching Students, “Different Types of Flexible Schedules”, last modified 2021, <https://www.enrichingstudents.com/different-types-flexible-schedules/#:~:text=A%20Rotating%20Drop%20Schedule&text=Each%20day%20the%20rotation%20of,meet%20for%20Periods%201%2D6>.

<sup>58</sup> Henrik Gert Larsen and Philip Adu, *The Theoretical Framework in Phenomenological Research: Development and Application*, (London; Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 11.

<sup>59</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Itinerant,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/itinerant>.

<sup>60</sup> Queen, *The Block Scheduling Handbook*, 147.



**Middle school movement:** This reform movement typically involves shifting grades to place students from grades 5-7 or 6-8 in the same building. The physical changes are accompanied by changes to the educational philosophy based on child development during this point in academic studies.<sup>61</sup>

**A phenomenological study:** “a design of inquiry...in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of the individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants.”<sup>62</sup>

**Qualitative research:** “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”<sup>63</sup> Qualitative research attempts to answer open-ended questions and explore complex situations.

**Singleton class:** In a 4x4 block schedule, one or more blocked periods can be divided into two classes that would meet approximately 45 minutes each. The classes may meet beyond the semester to satisfy the state requirement for credits, up to a full school year.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Benham, *Music Advocacy*, 170.

<sup>62</sup> Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Queen, *The Block Scheduling Handbook*, 147.

## Summary

Block scheduling, a well-established practice in American high schools, is relatively new in middle schools. The existing literature exploring the perceived effects of block scheduling on secondary music programs already exists through the work of several researchers, but the current literature studying the impact of block scheduling on middle school choral programs is less prevalent. As the American public education system continues to explore avenues for improving student academic and social development, establishing the current state of education is imperative. The qualitative, phenomenological study on the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs contributes to the thoughts and experiences of American middle school educators to the growing body of knowledge and provides possible direction for future researchers.

The current study provides insight into how educators perceive the effects of block scheduling. Canaday and Rettig have provided a foundation on which to study school scheduling practices, stating

“A schedule can be viewed as a resource; it is the schedule that permits the effective utilization of people, space, time, and resources in an organization. A schedule can help solve problems related to the delivery of instruction, or a schedule can be a major source of problems. A schedule can facilitate the institutionalization of desired programs and instructional practices.”<sup>65</sup>

Block scheduling at the middle school level provides such positive benefits and presents new challenges in building and retaining successful choral programs. The qualitative, phenomenological study utilizes a combination of responses from the national survey of middle school choral educators and the responses collected from the ten interviewed educators to present perspectives of block scheduling and its effects and to develop materials appropriate for music

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<sup>65</sup> Canady and Rettig, *Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools*, 29.

education advocacy. This study adds to the existing literature body and provides direction for future educators and music advocates in planning for and developing curricula based on block scheduling advantages and challenges. More importantly, this study aims to ask questions that will, in one author's words, "will lead to substantive understanding" of the potential role block scheduling may play in the future of music education.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Conway, *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, 192.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### History of Scheduling Practices in the United States

School reform has been debated sporadically for more than a century in the United States, beginning with a report made by the Committee on Secondary School Studies, also known as the Committee of Ten, in 1893.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the United States public education history, the length of class times has been variable and in constant reform. According to Johnson, the concept of “time” in education “can be defined in terms of extended days, extended years, year-round education, or reorganized school days.”<sup>68</sup> Controlling time is an effort to accomplish established outcomes, and schools are continually pressured to achieve such results by adopting schedules. Experimenting with various schedules has led to frequent trial and error as administrators and educators attempt to create successful student learning experiences. The current length of an academic year, 36 weeks, was established in 1890.

After 1890, however, the only continuity in scheduling was in the length of the school year and the number of class periods per day, which on average, was five or six periods. The rise of industrialism directly influenced the school schedule, “with its periods of equal length and limited time allotted for the change of classes,” reflecting “industrial training.”<sup>69</sup> The main influences of class scheduling remained in the needs of each school division. One author notes that “school schedules reflect directives from administrators as well as demands from teachers

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<sup>67</sup> Zepeda and Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", 138.

<sup>68</sup> Paula Johnson, "Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States" Ph.D. diss., Silver Lake College: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1996, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

and parents concerning the welfare of the student body.”<sup>70</sup> Traditional schedules would last until the adoption of block scheduling in the 1990s.

The change would come because of reforms in educational policy in the United States.

Norrington found that

While there may have been many reasons for schools to begin experimenting with these changes, Richard Miles and Larry Blocher (1996) suggest that the strongest urging for this movement came from Public Law 102-62 (The Education Council Act of 1991) which established the National Commission on Time and Learning that called for a ‘comprehensive review of the relationship between time and learning in the nation’s schools.’”<sup>71</sup>

Several issues were identified in the traditional schedule. According to Canady and Rettig, the main issues included the following: fragmented learning caused by multiple subject changes throughout the day, limited instructional opportunities and formats, and discipline problems caused by frequent rotation from class to class.<sup>72</sup> Johnson notes that educational divisions and administrators began adapting various schedules to improve the following:

1. Reduce the number of classes students must attend and prepare for each day and / or each term.
2. Allow students variable amounts of time for learning, without lowering standards, and without punishing those who need more or less time to learn.
3. Increase opportunities for some students to be accelerated.
4. Reduce the number of students teachers must prepare for and interact with each day and/or each term.
5. Reduce the number of courses for which teachers must prepare each day and/or term.
6. Reduce the fragmentation inherent in single-period schedules, a criticism that is especially pertinent to classes requiring extensive practice and/or laboratory work.
7. Provide teachers with blocks of teaching time that allow and encourage the use of active teaching strategies and greater student involvement.

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<sup>70</sup> Johnson, "Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States" Ph.D. diss., Silver Lake College: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1996, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Dannyel Marie Norrington, "Instrumental Music Instruction, Assessment, and the Block Schedule" Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 11.

8. Reduce the number of class changes.<sup>73</sup>

The primary goals ultimately focused on by school leaders were for students to have fewer subjects to study at one time, more elective offerings for high school students (especially during their senior year), and space to offer more advanced placement courses (AP) and/or vocational subjects.<sup>74</sup> Canady and Rettig determined that block schedules became popular in response to research that indicated increased student productivity, longer planning periods for teachers, higher achievement rates for students, development of more teaching strategies, reduced fragmentation apparent in traditional schedules, and fewer discipline issues.<sup>75</sup> School leaders hoped that these changes would involve students more in learning, and create a more student-centered classroom, a change from the traditional teacher-centered, lecture-note practice. These concepts were not constructed arbitrarily but were developed from the foundations of constructivism. Hackmann defines the basic tenets of constructivism as the following:

- Learning is socially constructed, allowing learners to interact with one another.
- Knowledge becomes generative as it is applied in context-based and meaningful problems.
- The most effective learning results in conceptual change.
- Optimal learning involves metacognition – reflecting on one’s learning throughout the process.<sup>76</sup>

In the constructivist classroom, the role of the teacher changes to a more passive one, students take a more active role in their learning, and the quality of student accomplishment

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<sup>73</sup> Norrington, "Instrumental Music Instruction, Assessment, and the Block Schedule" Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006, 13.

<sup>74</sup> David E. Gullatt, "Block Scheduling: The Effects on Curriculum and Student Productivity", *NASSP Bulletin* 90, no. 3 (2006), 250.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>76</sup> Donald G. Hackmann, "The Cautious Pace of School Reform: High School Scheduling in Iowa", *NASSP Bulletin* 83, no. 609 (1999), 69.

takes precedence over quantity.<sup>77</sup> This practice may not encourage a more productive learning environment, however, if teachers do not diversify their teaching strategies. As one author put it, “in all likelihood, many teachers will continue to lecture-only in longer time frames-and students may become increasingly disconnected from the learning process.”<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, there are many variables to reform. Simply changing the schedule does not reform education.<sup>79</sup>

### Types of Block Scheduling

School reform was initiated in the assertion that learning can be improved through change.<sup>80</sup> As the knowledge of how the brain works increases, so does how learning take place and time plays an important role.<sup>81</sup> Block scheduling aas a form of alternate scheduling is not a new concept in American public education. According to Lowther, modifying the schedule can be dated back to as early as 1959 with J. Lloyd Trump’s flexible modular scheduling (FMS), which arranged instructional time according to the needs of the studied subject matter.<sup>82</sup> Modular scheduling ultimately did not work: varying lengths of time proved too difficult for teachers and students alike, and unstructured time increased behavioral issues.<sup>83</sup> The movement towards block scheduling was developed from the belief that more time in the classroom and more social

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<sup>77</sup> Hackmann, "The Cautious Pace of School Reform: High School Scheduling in Iowa", 70.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, "Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States", 11.

<sup>80</sup> Dennis Steven York, "The Relationship between Block Scheduling and Student Performance: A Study of Traditional, Block -Four, Block -Three -by -Five, and Block -Eight School Schedules in Indiana", Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2004, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Raymond William Suttle Lowther, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia", Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 1998, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Lynn Canady and Michael D. Rettig, *Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 14-15.

interaction would increase student learning ability. This is based on Vygotsky's Theory of Social Development, which is defined as "a general theory of cognitive development with the major theme of the theoretical framework being that social interaction is fundamental to the development of cognition."<sup>84</sup> It also became clear that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to education was ineffective for student learning because everyone learns in different ways and at different rates of speed. One group said that "perhaps the most critical (and unsolved) issue facing schools regarding the allocation of time is the indisputable fact that some students need more time to learn than others."<sup>85</sup>

Block scheduling has become increasingly popular since the early 1990s. Pester found that "[a]s recently as 1994, block scheduling was being used by one in ten high schools nationally."<sup>86</sup> Due to the lack of federal and state regulations, two primary forms of block scheduling have emerged as a result of the push for educational reform reinvigorated in the 1980s: the 4x4 block and the A/B block. A/B block schedule may have alternating days and weeks but last the entire year.

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<sup>84</sup> Beth E. Pester, "Traditional and Block Scheduling: A Comparison of College Academic Performance Levels of First-Year Students Who Report Different High School Academic Scheduling Plans", Ph.D. diss., ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Canady and Rettig, *Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Pester, "Traditional and Block Scheduling: A Comparison of College Academic Performance Levels of First-Year Students Who Report Different High School Academic Scheduling Plans", 10.



Example of an A/B block schedule<sup>87</sup>:

Period	Start	End	# Min.
Block 1 / Block 5	7:30	9:00	90
Block 2 / Block 6	9:05	10:35	90
A Lunch / Flex Period 1	10:40	11:10	30
B Lunch / Flex Period 2	11:15	11:45	30
Block 3 / Block 7	11:50	1:20	90
Block 4 / Block 8	1:25	2:55	90

The 4x4 block consists of four class periods per day for eighteen weeks or one semester. The school year is divided into two semesters; this allows students to take up to eight classes per year.

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<sup>87</sup> James Bacon, "10 Examples of Middle and High School Schedules", accessed May 28, 2023, <https://www.edefficiency.com/post/10-examples-of-middle-and-high-school-schedules>, last updated August 6, 2021.

4x4 block example<sup>88</sup>:

Period	Start	End	# Min.
Block 1	7:30	9:00	90
Block 2	9:05	10:35	90
Lunch 1 / Flex Block	10:40	11:10	30
Lunch 2 / Flex Block	11:15	11:45	30
Block 3	11:50	1:20	90
Block 4	1:25	2:55	90

#### Identified Advantages of Block Scheduling

Potential strengths of the new schedules were identified during the initial design of varying forms of block scheduling: cross-curriculum disciplines, team building, and contextual teaching.<sup>89</sup> For full-time secondary educators, having three periods to teach and one to prepare can be ideal. The 4x4 block schedule provides educators with more extended and more consistent planning periods. In some states, daily planning is provided by law, and the 4x4 block schedule supports this policy.<sup>90</sup> Longer planning periods not only provide teachers with more preparation time but also increases potential time spent collaborating with other teachers, across respective departments or even on interdisciplinary projects.

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<sup>88</sup> Bacon, "10 Examples of Middle and High School Schedules", <https://www.edficiency.com/post/10-examples-of-middle-and-high-school-schedules>.

<sup>89</sup> Gullatt, "Block Scheduling: The Effects on Curriculum and Student Productivity", 252.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

A study conducted by Norrington determined that fewer transitions in the day created by block scheduling reduced discipline issues and supported a “cleaner school environment.”<sup>91</sup> The advantages of an A/B block schedule include a “cooling off” period when behavioral issues arise, possibly deflating future discipline problems, and giving students more time to complete assignments.<sup>92</sup> Teachers perceived a change in student behavior; the increase in time required higher expectations, and student achievement increased. Mattox et. al discovered that block scheduling at the middle school level particularly aided with disciplinary issues, provided students more time one-on-one with teachers, and student achievement was supported by fewer classes allowing more time for each class.<sup>93</sup> Zepeda and Mayers also concluded from anecdotal information collected from students and teachers that increased student-teacher interaction was an advantage of block scheduling.<sup>94</sup>

In Western North Carolina, a cross-section of teachers from five high schools was interviewed after experiencing a 4x4 block for three semesters.<sup>95</sup> 17 of 31 teachers found the schedule change to be an improvement, nine had no preference, and five preferred traditional schedules.<sup>96</sup> Most teachers reported having more time to work with students individually and were able to review work through various methods, increasing student academic success.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Norrington, "Instrumental Music Instruction, Assessment, and the Block Schedule", 16.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Kim Mattox, Dawson R. Hancock, and J. Allen Queen, "The Effect of Block Scheduling on Middle School Students' Mathematics Achievement", *NASSP Bulletin* 89, no. 642 (2005), 4.

<sup>94</sup> Zepeda and Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", 159.

<sup>95</sup> J.C. Hurley, "The 4 x 4 Block Scheduling Model: What do Students have to Say about it?" *NASSP Bulletin* 81, no. 593 (12, 1997), 53.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Hurley, "The 4 x 4 Block Scheduling Model: What do Students have to Say about it?", 54.

Mattox, Hancock, and Queen believe that “[a]lthough block scheduling is not a panacea for all issues surrounding student achievement in our schools, its promise as a powerful contributor to student learning has been demonstrated and should continue to be explored.”<sup>98</sup> Pester echoes this assertion, observing that the “unique environment of a block class period” relies on effective and diverse teaching strategies along with increased social interaction.<sup>99</sup>

Another advantage has to do with students’ curricular options. The teachers interviewed in the study indicated that the 4x4 block schedule provided more course options for students. Students may have greater access to electives with up to 8 possible class offerings. It also allowed more time for class activities and enrichment and increased positive relationships between teachers and students.<sup>100</sup> As one author put it, “six vocational teachers in three different schools reported increased enrollment in their programs. Apparently, many students take advantage of their additional electives by taking vocational classes.”<sup>101</sup> “Block scheduling does, indeed, hold promise as an important mechanism for stimulating school reform.”<sup>102</sup> York agrees, citing evidence from research of schools in Indiana:

The study reveals that students are more likely to receive an Honors Diploma with a block schedule. In low SES schools, block-scheduling is more likely to be beneficial to student performance on the SAT scores, GQEL scores, and GQEM scores. Block-scheduling should also be considered by school leaders of schools in metropolitan schools. Students enrolled in block scheduled schools in these locales are more likely to score higher on both the GQEL and GQEM.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Mattox, Hancock, and Queen, "The Effect of Block Scheduling on Middle School Students' Mathematics Achievement", p.10.

<sup>99</sup> Pester, "Traditional and Block Scheduling: A Comparison of College Academic Performance Levels of First-Year Students Who Report Different High School Academic Scheduling Plans", 9.

<sup>100</sup> Hurley, "The 4 x 4 Block Scheduling Model: What do Students have to Say about it?", 57.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Hackmann, "The Cautious Pace of School Reform: High School Scheduling in Iowa", 76.

<sup>103</sup> York, "The Relationship between Block Scheduling and Student Performance: A Study of Traditional, Block -Four, Block -Three -by -Five, and Block -Eight School Schedules in Indiana", 143.

Finally, Queen identifies block scheduling as an opportunity for students and teachers to interact with one another in “innovative ways” to accomplish their objectives.<sup>104</sup> It provides time for in-depth learning, grants students greater flexibility in accommodating their individual learning speeds and provides opportunities for “hands-on learning experiences.”<sup>105</sup> Queen also notes that block scheduling presents opportunities for curriculum integration, and that it “establishes a classroom environment that is more amenable to students.”<sup>106</sup>

#### Identified Disadvantages of Block Scheduling

Several weaknesses are identified in A/B block schedules, including the alteration of schedules by holidays and inclement weather, inconsistent availability of planning periods for teachers, which can be illegal in some states, and the need for review time caused by the lapse of daily instruction.<sup>107</sup> Teachers perceived semester-length classes as having less time to cover material than year-round courses, despite the increased time on task each day.<sup>108</sup> One of the most glaring issues identified was teacher lesson planning. While teachers had more time to incorporate differentiated instruction, the traditional lecture remained a common practice among educators. In Hackmann’s survey of Iowa high school principals, it became clear that “some principals believed their veteran teachers were unwilling to change their approaches to

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<sup>104</sup> Queen, *The Block Scheduling Handbook*, 72.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Norrington, "Instrumental Music Instruction, Assessment, and the Block Schedule", 15-16.

<sup>108</sup> Hurley, “The 4x4 Block Scheduling Model”, 59.

teaching.”<sup>109</sup> Zepeda and Mayers could not confirm that teachers “were really changing their practices” after block scheduling implementation.<sup>110</sup> Doing the same activities daily can possibly affect student engagement and productivity.. Using time efficiently can be a challenge.<sup>111</sup>

Sommerfeld quoted a student from a study of schools in the Vancouver, Washington district, stating “If teachers are good and keep their interest, block scheduling is terrific. But if they are bad, it can be awful.”<sup>112</sup>

Childers and Ireland studied efforts to utilize block scheduling in Boone, North Carolina. They found that “faculty professional development and yearly reflective analyses were essential for the continued success of the change. In this study, the vast majority of faculty indicated a desire to continue with the block schedule versus the older traditional secondary schedule.”<sup>113</sup> In short, educators wanted to continue using block scheduling but needed the training to improve efficiency and develop diverse teaching strategies. As Pantoliano notes, increased class time does not guarantee diverse instructional practices that are student-centered, which is the ultimate goal.<sup>114</sup> For those educators whom do not have the tools necessary to effectively use the increased time found in block scheduling classes, they may resort to increasing student’s

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<sup>109</sup> Hackmann, "The Cautious Pace of School Reform: High School Scheduling in Iowa", 75.

<sup>110</sup> Zepeda and Mayers, "An Analysis of Research on Block Scheduling", 161.

<sup>111</sup> Carl D. King, "On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses", *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 7, no. 2 (1998), 23.

<sup>112</sup> Meg Sommerfeld, "More and More Schools Putting Block Scheduling to Test of Time", *Education Week* 15, no. 35 (1996), 1.

<sup>113</sup> Gullatt, "Block Scheduling: The Effects on Curriculum and Student Productivity", 254.

<sup>114</sup> Letizia Pantoliano, "The Influence of Restructuring Time and Professional Development on the use of Interactive Instruction: A Case Study in One Middle School Located in a Suburb of Western New Jersey", Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005, 39.

independent work time, also known as “homework time.”<sup>115</sup> The common practice of homework time may be appealing to students, but Pester found that it contributes to time management challenges for students when they attend college.<sup>116</sup>

Another issue involved course load. Students could not balance course loads and schedule “math, foreign language, or music courses in the best sequence.”<sup>117</sup> Teachers expressed concern about lack of consistent contact with students throughout the academic year. Between student scheduling issues and staffing arrangements, schedule modifications were difficult or impossible.<sup>118</sup> Teachers also noted that absences caused students to fall quickly behind, and field trips were also scheduled less frequently due to this issue.<sup>119</sup> Additionally, teachers noted that the length of student time in the classroom had been reduced by the 4x4 block schedule. Hurley found that “[c]ompared to a 50-minute period for 180 days, the 90-minute period for 90 days has 900 fewer minutes each year.”<sup>120</sup>

The reduced time and challenges posed by student absences may be the source of a potential issue identified by Gullatt: students studying material more in-depth than breadth and not knowing possible material on standardized tests. Gullatt also discovered that “[t]he College Board researched the relationship between block schedules and student performance on AP examinations and found that students in blocked courses earned lower scores on AP exams when

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<sup>115</sup> Pester, "Traditional and Block Scheduling: A Comparison of College Academic Performance Levels of First-Year Students Who Report Different High School Academic Scheduling Plans", 80.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Hurley, “The 4x4 Block Scheduling Model”, 59.

<sup>118</sup> Hackmann, "The Cautious Pace of School Reform: High School Scheduling in Iowa", 75.

<sup>119</sup> Hurley, “The 4x4 Block Scheduling Model”, 60.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 62.

compared to students on the traditional schedule.”<sup>121</sup> However, studies such as Hackmann’s indicate little effect on standardized testing. Hackmann surveyed principals from 399 Iowa public and nonpublic high schools and found this to not be a major issue in that state. In fact, principals argued their schools did not need to rush into block scheduling implementation because their schools’ high achievement scores indicated a lack of need.<sup>122</sup> Citing the lack of research linking block scheduling to student achievement, many schools in Iowa decided to wait until more definitive conclusions could be drawn.<sup>123</sup>

Conflicts with co-curricular programs have also been identified as a disadvantage to block scheduling. Hackmann’s Iowa principal survey found this to be a major issue in that state. He determined that “Iowa residents are extremely supportive of the arts, ...and music programs in particular have earned a prominent place in many Iowa high school curricula.”<sup>124</sup> A common practice in Iowa schools was for music students to be pulled from study halls and occasionally from other academic classes to receive solo or small group instruction. The 4x4 block schedule eliminates study halls, which would cause issues with maintaining personalized music lessons. Several study participants indicated an attempt to work around this problem with no success<sup>125</sup> Finally, transfer students coming from schools with similar schedules likely have no issues, because they could be placed in a similar class and perhaps quickly rise to the level of the rest of

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<sup>121</sup> Gullatt, "Block Scheduling: The Effects on Curriculum and Student Productivity", 253.

<sup>122</sup> Hackmann, "The Cautious Pace of School Reform: High School Scheduling in Iowa", 74.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 74.



the class. However, if the student were to transfer from a traditional schedule to a block schedule, the potential gap in learning may be too much to successfully overcome.<sup>126</sup>

### Block Scheduling and Music Education

#### **A Brief History of American Public Music Education**

The idea of music education in the United States first began with the desire to improve congregational singing. When European settlers first arrived in North America, they brought with them refined classical music practices. The hardships they endured in the new land, however, caused the “ability to make aesthetically satisfying music” to decline.<sup>127</sup> As more Protestants seeking freedom from religious persecution arrived in the colonies, churches were more concerned with congregation members being able to participate in music regardless of literacy, and the Old Way, or “lining out,” was introduced. A deacon, or “precentor,” would chant the psalm one line at a time and the congregation would echo the line. As one author put it, “lining out began, then, as a way of cueing congregation members on the texts they were to sing.”<sup>128</sup> Each congregation began to develop improvisation on the few standard psalms available and they would sing with enthusiasm the few hymn-tunes they had been taught. The result, over time, would prove disastrous to congregational singing. Cotton Mather, a Puritan clergyman from Boston, described in his diary the singing ability in his church: “The psalmody is but poorly

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<sup>126</sup> Johnson, “Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States”, 40.

<sup>127</sup> Lowther, “Music Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia”, 46.

<sup>128</sup> Richard Crawford and Larry Hamberlin, *An introduction to America’s Music*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 26.

carried on in my flock, and in a variety and regularity inferior to some others. I would see about it.”<sup>129</sup>

To improve the state of music in churches, singing schools were developed. Music teachers would travel throughout a region and provide master classes as well as individual lessons. Singing schools would last in one area for a couple of weeks to a few months, and entire families would sometimes participate.<sup>130</sup> By the early 1720s, “a more disciplined” manner of singing had become common in the area of Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>131</sup> Regular Singing, or singing according to established guidelines, became the more common form of congregational singing. More styles of congregational singing would follow, such as the shape-note tradition from the southern United States, but ultimately it would be the work of Lowell Mason that would provide the foundation for American music education.

A public education system was created after the United States was formed as a nation. The country was born during the Enlightenment Period, a time in which self-exploration and a drive to explore the boundaries of academic subjects such as math and science were paramount. Such philosophy would greatly influence the creation of government and education in the United States. One author noted that “many citizens, including school officials of that time, believed that music was an important part of a child’s overall education, and their beliefs provided the basis for the first inclusion of music as an academic subject in U.S. public schools.”<sup>132</sup> Lowell Mason

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<sup>129</sup> Nicholas Temperley, “The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (1981), 539.

<sup>130</sup> Lowther, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia", 48.

<sup>131</sup> Crawford and Hamberlin, *An Introduction to America's Music*, 29.

<sup>132</sup> J. Scott Goble, *What's So Important about Music Education?*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 11.

was one such official who helped establish the Boston Academy of Music in 1833.<sup>133</sup> Prior to his efforts to establish music as part of the public school curriculum, music was primarily included in the school setting if teachers and/or principals “took that responsibility upon themselves.”<sup>134</sup>

Between 1831 and 1861, educational divisions according to age levels would be incorporated into the public school system.<sup>135</sup> The concept of the high school was the last to be added. Common school education in many American communities, especially rural areas, and small towns, ended with the eighth grade until well after the Civil War.<sup>136</sup> Public school music courses were first provided by music specialists, and students were given one half-hour lesson per week in singing and reading music.<sup>137</sup> Efforts to include instrumental music in public education would occur around 1900. The concern that choral music singing would not support the argument for including music alone was the catalyst for instrumental music being added to the curriculum.

Before this practice, music was considered more of an accomplishment rather than a course of study. Music was expected to, in the words of one writer, “serve the interest of the general education, patriotism, and to a lesser degree, religion.”<sup>138</sup> Lowther writes that in 1902, the New England Education League would be the first to recommend a “comprehensive, four-

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<sup>133</sup> Crawford and Hamelin, *An Introduction to America's Music*, 70.

<sup>134</sup> Johnson, "Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States", 13.

<sup>135</sup> Janet C. Paider-Rank, "Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level on the Elementary Classroom and Elementary Music Program", Ph.D. diss., (Silver Lake College, 1998), 18.

<sup>136</sup> Lowther, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia", 56.

<sup>137</sup> Paider-Rank, "Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level", 18.

<sup>138</sup> Lowther, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling", 55.

year music course consisting of music theory, ensemble performance, and applied study.”<sup>139</sup> The first high school with a complete music program was in Chelsea, Massachusetts, and by 1910, music, particularly choral music, was an established part of the curriculum in many schools across the country. More elective/exploratory classes were added, including art classes, vocational training, and home economics.<sup>140</sup> The addition of more subjects caused a crowding issue in the school schedule. To further complicate matters, the accrediting of applied music classes was questioned; school administrators did not consider it to be a topic of serious study. By developing a progressive curriculum, music educators were able to design a framework of chorus, orchestra, music theory, and music appreciation; these music courses would help motivate students to stay in school past the eighth grade.<sup>141</sup>

Industry had expanded considerably at this point in American history, thanks to innovations such as the assembly line, and public-school education became a system for training American youth for the labor force. Paider-Rank identified several courses that schools began to offer: “[d]rawing, clay modeling, color work, nature study, sewing, cooking, and manual training were established in the elementary school setting, and education in the sciences, manual and home arts, as well as training for vocational occupations were organized for the high school setting.”<sup>142</sup> Because of the distinction between primary, intermediate, grammar, and high school settings, music instructional delivery needed to be changed. Music educators such as Luther

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<sup>139</sup> Lowther, “Music Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling”, 57.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>142</sup> Paider-Rank, “Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level”, 24.

Whiting Mason and George B. Loom created textbooks that provided progressive lessons and concepts.<sup>143</sup>

According to Paider-Rank, the public school system continued to advance in the early twentieth century, thanks to further grade level organization to include junior high school, the creation of the Carnegie unit, further advances in developmental psychology, and the “implementation of the professional superintendent and principal”<sup>144</sup> Paider-Rank also identifies the Carnegie Unit as a “by-product of the effort to establish pensions for retiring college faculty members.”<sup>145</sup> The Carnegie Unit is named after the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which developed guidelines that helped to develop clear boundaries between high schools and colleges, and universities. Ultimately, the Carnegie Unit would establish a standard for measuring progress toward graduation from high school. Paider-Rank further explains its purpose:

The standard set by the Carnegie Unit states that student seat time in a given subject area is equated to completion or mastery of that subject. Provided the student passes the course work in that quarter or semester, he or she is awarded a standard number of credit hours that are eventually applied toward graduation, and in many instances required for college entrance.<sup>146</sup>

The curriculum in American public education changed as a result of the development of such guidelines. The use of the Carnegie Unit and recommendations on educational practices informed by developmental psychology needed to be practically and efficiently utilized. Charles W. Eliot, Harvard president in 1892 began an investigation into improving the organization of

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<sup>143</sup> Paider-Rank, “Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level”, 21.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

elementary and secondary education.<sup>147</sup> The junior high school concept, which would address the pivotal development period in adolescence, was established. The Progressive Movement in public education would begin to wane in the 1940s, which would prove detrimental to the support of music education when the United States would enter the Space Race in the late 1950s. Emphasis on “core” subjects, such as math and science became the response as the state of American education was evaluated and compared to that of other countries like the Soviet Union. Desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s would also affect the public education system. As one author put it, “High schools were now trying to create world-class scientists in order to compete with Russia, and equal-opportunity education spread to the less privileged in order to develop their skills as well as all other Americans.”<sup>148</sup> General course requirements by 1965 were math; science; social studies; English; a foreign language; practical, visual and performing arts; and physical education.<sup>149</sup>

Scheduling practices changed throughout the country as the federal government continued to establish educational reform and policy. One author noted that “as society changes, so must schools to meet the challenges placed before them.”<sup>150</sup> Prior to 1970, American public schools were classified into three tiers: elementary, junior high, and (senior) high school. Paider-Rank describes the junior high school as having an “identity crisis” during this time, because ninth grade was treated more as a “high school year housed in a different building.”<sup>151</sup> To rectify

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<sup>147</sup> Paider-Rank, “Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level”, 64.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>149</sup> Johnson, "Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States", 20.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

this ineffective grade division as well as accommodate school desegregation and the baby boom population crowding schools, middle schools were created in the 1960s and 1970s. Ninth grade was moved to high school and groupings of fifth or sixth through eighth became the intermediate level. Implementation of the education in this new division did not change, however, until the National Association of Secondary School Principals issued *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*.<sup>152</sup> This document advocated for the organization of middle schools to be around teaching teams that would establish a community learning environment more appropriate for the psychological needs of adolescents.<sup>153</sup>

The middle school philosophy became based around the needs of the pre-adolescent learner, which prompted innovation in curriculum creation and interactive instructional strategies.<sup>154</sup> Today, teams are generally comprised of approximately 150 students taught by a cohesive group of interdisciplinary teachers who teach collaboratively to support and encourage the concept of community that is central to the middle school philosophy.<sup>155</sup> This cooperative teaching strategy also provides flexibility in the schedule and establishes greater emphasis on the needs of the student. Most importantly, the integrated approach to education increases student ability to make connections in learning across content areas, increasing the relevance of the instruction.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Johnson, "Critical Evaluation of Music Program Block Scheduling in Secondary Schools in the United States", 68.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Pantoliano, "The Influence of Restructuring Time and Professional Development on the use of Interactive Instruction, 128.

<sup>155</sup> June Hinckley, "Blocks, Wheels, and Teams: Building a Middle School Schedule", *Music Educators Journal* 78, no. 6 (1992), 28.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 28.

There arose a new philosophy for teaching students between the ages of 10-13 as the study of child development progressed. This is a pivotal development stage not only in the physical body, but in cognitive development as well. The concept of “middle school” was born from this philosophy. One writer noted that “between 1970 and 1987, the number of school systems using middle schools that housed Grades 6-8 dramatically increased; this grouping is now the most widely used grade organization for American middle schools.”<sup>157</sup> According to Hinckley, the agenda of current middle schools is to “make certain that every student in the school has a reasonable opportunity to excel at something.”<sup>158</sup>

Music education would also undergo a radical change in the 1960s, thanks to the work of the Yale Seminar, and the Music Educators’ National Conference, which culminated in the Tanglewood Symposium. The result of the findings from the Tanglewood Symposium was a vision of the future of music education. Despite the progress initiated by music education reform in the 1960s, its inclusion in public education would be threatened by the Reagan administration’s report on the status of the American public education system, entitled *A Nation at Risk*, published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983.

The Music Educators National Conference would release its “Imperative for Music Education” in 1991. The arts would be written into federal law in 1994 with the passage of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 would acknowledge the arts as a core subject and establish national education standards.<sup>159</sup> However, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a response to poor achievement identified through testing of math and science at the eighth-grade

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<sup>157</sup> Linda A. Hartley, “Influence of Starting Grade and School Organization on Enrollment and Retention in Beginning Instrumental Music”, *Journal of Research in Music Education* 44, no. 4 (1996), 306.

<sup>158</sup> Hinckley, “Blocks, Wheels, and Teams: Building a Middle School Schedule”, 27.

<sup>159</sup> Lowther, “Music Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia”, 60.



level, would create challenges for music education across the country. Under NCLB, students were required to pass standardized exams to demonstrate academic achievement. One researcher stated that “the idea supporting this new law was that if students were required to pass a standardized achievement exam, they would work harder to meet these expectations.”<sup>160</sup> West interviewed ten music teachers from schools in Michigan that were not meeting the adequate yearly progress markers put into place by the No Child Left Behind Act to determine perceived effects of standardized testing. He determined that the “general perception among these teachers was that their administrators had become so focused on meeting testing demands that they were not invested in the music programs.”<sup>161</sup>

Most recently, music education has been further recognized at the federal level with the latest revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is now called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA lists music as a specific (and separate from the other arts) part of a “well-rounded education.”<sup>162</sup> This has helped to increase funding for some music programs, and at least bring attention to music’s place in the curriculum. Despite such progress in federal recognition, individual states continue to support music education in varying ways: ESSA does not require states to include music as part of the curriculum. In addition to tenuous support, music educators also faced challenges with the implementation of block scheduling across the country. MENC, now known as the National Association for Music Education, reported educators from more than 200 schools in 35 states requesting information about block

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<sup>160</sup> Donald Hugh Parkerson and Jo Ann Parkerson, *The Struggle for Public Education Ten Themes in American Educational History*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 106.

<sup>161</sup> Chad West, "Teaching music in an era of high-stakes testing and budget reductions", *Arts Education Policy Review* 113, no. 2 (2012), 76.

<sup>162</sup> National Association for Music Education, “Everything ESSA”, last modified 2023, <http://nafme.org/advocacy/ESSA/>.

scheduling strategies in 1995 alone. One researcher aptly stated that “block scheduling was identified as the number one reform issue facing public school music teachers.”<sup>163</sup>

In 2006, the Music Educator’s National Conference (MENC), now referred to as the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), conducted an online survey to determine what class schedules were most often experienced by the association’s members. The survey also asked respondents to rate their current schedules. 641 teachers responded. When asked what the most common form of scheduling was in their district, “21 percent of the total said block scheduling; 20 percent traditional 8-period day; 18 percent 7-period day; 12 percent 6-period day; 11 percent other; 5 percent parallel scheduling; 4 percent alternate (11-period or other; shift days); 2 percent trimester; 0 percent shortened week (4 day school week); 0 percent year-round school.”<sup>164</sup> When asked what form of scheduling would be ideal (respondent’s preference), 29 percent indicated a preference for the traditional 8-period day; 18 percent, the 7-period day; 9 percent for the 6-period day; 7 percent block scheduling; 5 percent parallel scheduling; 5 percent alternate (11-period or other; shift days); 5 percent shortened week (4 day school week); 7 percent other; 4 percent year-round school; 1 percent trimester.<sup>165</sup>

The NAfME survey reflects the ongoing initiative to effect change in student learning and achievement spurred on by the federal government’s Race to the Top and the Common Core Standards. Race to the Top is a reform model that is designed to ensure students are college and

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<sup>163</sup> Lowther, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia", 15.

<sup>164</sup> Rosalind Fehr, "Online Survey: Music Educators Discuss Scheduling. (News Features)", *Teaching Music* 14, no. 3 (2006), 12.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

career ready.<sup>166</sup> In addition to revising the national standards of education (known now as the Common Core Standards), the push to increase student achievement and readiness for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an increased demand for “educational accountability,” and scheduling changes are at the forefront of strategies for addressing such demand.<sup>167</sup>

#### Block Scheduling: Identified Advantages for Music Ensembles

Derouen summarizes the main disadvantage of traditional scheduling as the failure to consider the individual student’s needs. The traditional schedule does not provide the flexibility needed to allow students varying amounts of learning time. Derouen theorizes that “Chances for accelerated learning or enrichment are limited at best. The idle time that advanced students encounter may lead to boredom and a redirection of creative energy. Those students who learn less quickly may act out through frustration.”<sup>168</sup>

Longer class periods are advantageous to music ensembles because of the possibility of such flexibility. Frequently, subject material studied in performing arts classes emphasizes pedagogy and the need to produce a consumable product for the public. Choral music ensembles are traditionally large, performance-based groups. Instructional time is primarily devoted to preparing for public performances, competitions, and festivals, and time to incorporate a broader curriculum is at a premium.

Having more time in class allows for more fundamentals practice, as well as extended lessons in history, culture, and more. As Van Zandt noted, “Music educators who work with a block scheduling system have found that non-performing, standards-based activities can be

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<sup>166</sup> Angela McCord, "The Impact of Interdisciplinary Teaming, Flexible Block Scheduling, and Advisory Programs on Select South Carolina Title I Middle Schools", Ph.D. diss., South Carolina State University, 2019, 17.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>168</sup> Dana A. Derouen, "Maybe it's Not the Children: Eliminating some Middle School Problems through Block Support and Team Scheduling", *The Clearing House* 71, no. 3 (1998), 146.

included in the longer class periods since the students usually cannot rehearse for ninety minutes at a time.”<sup>169</sup> Paiden-Rank agrees with Van Zandt, proposing that longer rehearsals allow students to meet more of the standards of learning in music, including those related to listening, evaluation, composition, and cross-genre connections, which may be left out entirely in a traditional schedule because of the performance-based needs of the programs.<sup>170</sup> Student access to music classes may increase, and teachers have more time to prepare for classes in schedules such as the 4x4 block schedule. For full-time secondary educators, having three periods to teach and one to prepare can be ideal. Students may have greater access to music education with up to six possible class offerings. In Lowther’s study, however, teachers reported better ensemble balance in A/B block scheduling than in the 4x4 design.<sup>171</sup>

Hook’s survey of members of the Choralist and Music-Ed listservs in 1995 revealed that block scheduling can aid music programs in providing more preparation time for solo/small ensemble performances, additional sectional preparations for music festivals, and it also allows teachers the opportunity to spend more time on topics like music history and music theory.<sup>172</sup> King addresses small group work even more by observing that extended blocks provide opportunity for remedial work when needed.<sup>173</sup> King also determined that having more time in class allows traditional choral programs to meet more National Standards for Music Education:

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<sup>169</sup> Kathryn Van Zandt, “Is It Curtains for Traditional Ensembles?”, *Teaching music*, 8, no. 5 (2001), 29.

<sup>170</sup> Paiden-Rank, “Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level”, 58.

<sup>171</sup> Lowther, “Music Teachers’ Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia”, 131.

<sup>172</sup> Martin Hook, “Block Scheduling and its Effect on Secondary-School Music Performance Classes”, *The Choral Journal* 36, no. 4 (1995), 28.

<sup>173</sup> King, “On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses”, 23.

Students have time to study the historical and cultural settings of the music they are singing and can study the text and its emotional implications in depth. Likewise, they can explore a wide variety of repertoire, working to gain a broad understanding of its elements.<sup>174</sup>

#### Block Scheduling: Identified Disadvantages for Music Ensembles

The earliest conducted studies of the effects of block scheduling on music programs began in the first half of the 1990s. Kuzmick's 1996 study determined that schedules such as the A/B block had little to no effect, at least in the Maryland schools participating in the study. However, a negative impact caused by the 4x4, or modified block schedule, was perceived.<sup>175</sup> In a 2004 survey, participants were asked if the music schedule had been affected by mandatory testing that resulted from the No Child Left Behind Act. 55 percent of responding MENC members indicated an experience in schedule changes; 38 percent experienced a negative impact on music programs, and 31 percent "said there was decreased time for electives."<sup>176</sup>

Helton and Paetz examined the equity of music access in Ohio secondary schools, determining that secondary music classes are considered important, but optional. They argue:

Historically, subjects like math and science possessed secure places in high school graduation requirements, so they did not compete for legitimacy in a school's schedule in the same way as elective classes like music. But why are some classes given more academic weight than others? Given that post-secondary success remains a common goal of educators, this question feels especially salient as high schools become more racially diverse and local grade point averages predict post-secondary success more reliably than nationally standardized tests like the SAT.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> King, "On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses", 22.

<sup>175</sup> Lowther, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Block Scheduling on Enrollment and Ensemble Balance in High School Performing Arts Classes in the Commonwealth of Virginia", 79.

<sup>176</sup> Fehr, "Online Survey: Music Educators Discuss Scheduling. (News Features)", *Teaching Music* 14, no. 3 (2006), 12.

<sup>177</sup> Benjamin C. Helton and Allison M. Paetz, "Equity of Music Access and Enrollment in Ohio Secondary Schools", *Contributions to Music Education* 46, (2021), 170.

Specific challenges for music programs using block scheduling have also been identified by experienced educators. One such challenge is student access to music programs. Van Zandt quotes a participant in his research, saying “Robert Foster, professor of music at the University of Kansas, believes, ‘At a younger age, when the students are forced to make a choice between recess and ensemble, a lot of kids don’t want to give up their recess. These students are then denied a musical experience, not because they don’t like music, but because the choice is one that’s not acceptable to them.’”<sup>178</sup> Hall also found that the 4x4 block schedule particularly influenced student enrollment in music classes. His research with 35 band directors in Colorado concluded that 91% of the surveyed schools experienced a decline in music program enrollment. There was no increase in enrollment at any of the schools during the studied period. Hall determined the most challenging aspect was keeping college-bound students in music programs, with upperclassmen experiencing the most difficulty in having access to music programs and freshmen having the least difficulty enrolling in music.<sup>179</sup> In his 1995 study, Meidl drew a similar conclusion, stating “it is clear, and likely, that if a school system moves to block scheduling that there may be a decrease in music program enrollment.”<sup>180</sup>

Baker studied scheduling patterns of high school music students who earned multiple credits in music ensembles. By surveying freshman music majors enrolled in ten Texas universities, Baker determined scheduling to be the most prevalent issue.<sup>181</sup> His survey covered ensemble enrollment, classes taken outside of the traditional school day, and types of high school schedules. Baker noted that difficulties with counselors was a factor in prohibiting or complicating student enrollment in

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<sup>178</sup> Van Zandt, “Is It Curtains for Traditional Ensembles?”, 26.

<sup>179</sup> Cronenberg, “Music Teachers’ Perceptions of General Music as a Required Middle Level Course”, 69.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>181</sup> Vicki D. Baker, “Scheduling Accommodations Among Students Who Persist in High School Music Ensembles”, *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 18, no. 2 (April 2009), 7.

music courses.<sup>182</sup> Hartley also examined scheduling practices in elementary, junior high, and middle schools in Indiana, Virginia, and Ohio. Although her study did not specifically examine block scheduling practices, her work produced similar results: “Scheduling conflicts have been cited as a primary reason for student dropout from instrumental programs. If instrumental music instruction conflicted with other classes or activities, students tended to withdraw from band.”<sup>183</sup> Helton and Paetz, conversely, note that scheduling issues for music classes caused by block scheduling appear to trend nationally, but when they examined regional data, factors such as urbanicity, demographics, financial support, and block scheduling “showed no predictive validity.”<sup>184</sup> On a similar note, nearly two-thirds of the respondents to Hook’s survey indicated that students had opportunity to enroll in more music classes thanks to block scheduling but did not enroll. No particular reasons were given for the lack of enrollment.<sup>185</sup>

Perhaps the most significant disadvantages of the 4x4 block schedule are the lack of continuity for progressive courses and ensemble personnel turnover. King notes that teachers, under pressure to provide quality performances, may find it difficult to do so due to the lack of consistency from semester to semester. In King’s study, one participant noted that “often, teachers on block scheduling find themselves facing a brand-new band or chorus at the beginning of spring semester and literally ‘starting over.’”<sup>186</sup> Students may also experience learning retention difficulties when courses cannot be taken sequentially or must be repeated. Another

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<sup>182</sup> Baker, “Scheduling Accommodations Among Students Who Persist in High School Music Ensembles”, 10.

<sup>183</sup> Hartley, “Influence of Starting Grade and School Organization on Enrollment and Retention in Beginning Instrumental Music”, 315.

<sup>184</sup> Helton and Paetz “Equity of Music Access and Enrollment in Ohio Secondary Schools”, 170.

<sup>185</sup> Hook, “Block Scheduling and its Effect on Secondary-School Music Performance Classes”, 29.

<sup>186</sup> King, “On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses”, 23.

participant in King's study noted that "[d]epending on the type of block schedule being used, students often find themselves making tough decisions regarding the classes they can take each semester."<sup>187</sup> For some students, the participant observed, band class may not be available to them because it would not fit into their schedule. This could result in student attrition and a decline in band enrollment, which increases challenges for the music program.<sup>188</sup> Norrington further details the potential negative impacts of the 4x4 block schedule, stating:

Because the 4X4 schedule is rigid in its design by allowing only a few classes offered at specific times, music students may decide to replace band with another course that they may not be able to otherwise take. In the 4X4 block, taking band each semester means devoting 25% of time to music. If students choose to take other music classes such as choir and/or orchestra as well, then the conflict significantly increases.<sup>189</sup>

Williams agrees with Norrington's assessment of scheduling conflicts and further observes:

It is evident that, in the push for academic excellence, some students opt to enroll in multiple honors and advanced placement courses in hopes of raising their grade point averages and increasing the likelihood of admission to preferred colleges. Additionally, students who have tested poorly in areas such as reading and math may be forced into extra remedial courses. In either case, these students would have fewer, if any, opportunities to elect music courses. Then there are scheduling conflicts, uncooperative counselors, block schedules, students with too many competing interests, or the need to work.<sup>190</sup>

Williams also adds that "once a student has missed the entry point for participation in traditional ensembles, it is often difficult to break into the system as a beginner. Few high school programs (especially instrumental) have serious options for students with no previous performance skills."<sup>191</sup> Rohner also divulged from his 2002 study that 73% of schools reported enrollment

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<sup>187</sup> King, "On the Opportunities and Challenges of Block Scheduling: Impact on Methods Courses", 23.

<sup>188</sup> Norrington, "Instrumental Music Instruction, Assessment, and the Block Schedule", 1.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>190</sup> David A. Williams, "The Elephant in the Room", *Music Educators Journal*. 98, no. 1 (2011), 51.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.



decline in band and orchestra after the implementation of the 4x4 block schedule. Before the schedule change, 11% of the same surveyed schools reported attrition in band and orchestra.<sup>192</sup>

Richard Miles and Larry Blocher determined similar issues with enrollment decline due to schedule conflicts after surveying schools from Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin in 1996.<sup>193</sup>

### Summary

Scheduling can have an impact on the development of music programs. It is a factor between successful and unsuccessful arts programs.<sup>194</sup> Block scheduling can exacerbate this issue but can also provide solutions. With more classes offered, there is the opportunity to have beginning methods classes for inexperienced students. Paider-Rank observed that elementary school block scheduling can have positive and negative effects on music programs, depending on how the schedule is constructed.<sup>195</sup> The ultimate goals when considering how to organize a schedule are for the schedule to always be student oriented, for electives to receive equal consideration so that the program offered is both comprehensive and balanced, and that students, staff, and educators should be included in the process.<sup>196</sup> Block scheduling can benefit music programs, but all decisions regarding scheduling must remain student-centered. Pantoliano cites behavioral psychology findings to support this argument, stating that an “individualized learning

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<sup>192</sup> Norrington, "Instrumental Music Instruction, Assessment, and the Block Schedule", 18.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Cronenberg, "Music Teachers' Perceptions of General Music as a Required Middle Level Course", 69.

<sup>195</sup> Paider-Rank, "Effects of Block Scheduling at the Primary Level", 174.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 75.

environment increases learning and retention. Macro scheduling provides the structure to support the application of these psychological findings.”<sup>197</sup>

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify how common the practice of block scheduling is in American public middle schools. By gathering observations from experienced middle school choral directors currently working in a block schedule setting, curriculum needs, staffing issues, and potential scheduling challenges can be identified. This study is intended to examine the perspectives of current middle school choral educators who have experienced block scheduling and its potential effects on choral music programs. A qualitative design and descriptive phenomenological approach will provide insight into potential advantages and disadvantages presented by block scheduling in middle schools. Such exploration will aid in making connections between block scheduling challenges and staffing needs, and in the development of advocacy materials. To facilitate understanding of how this research paradigm and methodology evolved, this chapter is guided by two questions:

- 1) Which structure is most appropriate for studying the lived experiences of middle school choral directors?
- 2) How can a descriptive phenomenological approach identify challenges and assets to block scheduling and develop an action plan for choral directors to use, given that scheduling is not presented in a unified way across the country?

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<sup>197</sup> Pantoliano, "The Influence of Restructuring Time and Professional Development on the use of Interactive Instruction", 20.

## Design

Phenomenology is a term that can refer to philosophical matters to various research approaches. Smith defines it as “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.”<sup>198</sup> For the purpose of this study, phenomenology refers to the examination of middle school choral directors’ lived experiences with various forms of class scheduling. Their perceptions can shed light on how scheduling can be an asset or a detriment to choral arts performing programs and provide a foundation for developing universal strategies for adopting block scheduling in the future, as well as steps into correcting or supporting current scheduling status. Burkholder et al. writes, “[q]ualitative approaches to inquiry are primarily for deep explanation of a phenomenon and are often used to develop or validate theory. They are generally inductive, and the data from which the qualitative researcher works are principally textual, or narrative.”<sup>199</sup> A phenomenological approach gives voice to individual situations, as class scheduling is not unified across states or even from one division to another. Finlay describes phenomenological research further, observing, “[i]t is a way of seeing how things appear to us through experience. More than a method, phenomenology demands an open way of being—one that examines taken-for-granted human situations as they are experienced in everyday life but which go typically unquestioned.”<sup>200</sup> Thus, the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to illuminate the lived experiences of middle school choral educators working with block schedules, giving precedence to individual description and meaning of the

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<sup>198</sup> David Woodruff Smith, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>.

<sup>199</sup> Gary J. Burkholder, Kimberley A. Cox, Linda M. Crawford, and John H. Hitchcock, eds. *Research Design and Methods: An Applied Guide for the Scholar-Practitioner*, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2020), 7.

<sup>200</sup> Linda Finlay, “Unfolding the Phenomenological Research Process”, *The Journal of humanistic psychology*, 53, no. 2 (2013), 173.

educators' work. A case study approach was considered, which could analyze a particular situation over time, but did not meet the requirement of focusing on lived experiences.<sup>201</sup>

The current study will not attempt to judge the meaning behind the lived experiences of middle school choral directors. It will, however, emphasize what choral directors working in a block scheduling environment may identify as challenges and advantages to choral performing ensembles operating in such schedules. The researcher has experience working in a middle school that uses block scheduling. To reduce bias, two concepts will be utilized during the investigation: epoché and phenomenological reduction. Epoché, at its simplest of terms, means to suspend judgment. By doing so, the researcher can facilitate phenomenological reduction. In other words, the researcher will refrain from psychoanalyzing the experiences of the participants. As Finlay emphasizes,

It is the researcher's task to engage the phenomenological attitude to go beyond participants' words and reflections (or words in a text) in order to capture something of implicit horizons of meaning and prereflective experience (i.e., the actual experience before thinking about it).<sup>202</sup>

The purpose of this study is to explore block scheduling phenomena, thus bracketing the phenomenal representation in the participant's mind and refraining from drawing one conclusion or another.<sup>203</sup> Edmund Husserl identified these two concepts as key to consistent phenomenological study. In *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Husserl states that "the sole task and service of phenomenology is to clarify the meaning of this world."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-By-Step Guide*, (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2020), 47.

<sup>202</sup> Finlay, "Unfolding the Phenomenological Research Process", *The Journal of humanistic psychology*, 53, no. 2 (2013), 185.

<sup>203</sup> Larsen and Adu, *The Theoretical Framework in Phenomenological Research: Development and Application*, 11.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Finlay agrees, stating that “[t]he aim of a phenomenological study is to investigate experience as we live it over time, as opposed to how we conceptualize it in a fixed way.”<sup>205</sup> Over time and from one person to another, then, what is considered reality and truth is not fixed in one particular way.

As the lived experiences of middle school choral educators are influenced by experience, time, job responsibilities, division practices and policies, and student engagement and enrollment, there is no immediately visible, universal result of block scheduling’s effects on middle school choral programs. With this amorphous reality in mind, Burkholder et al. concludes, “[w]hat is truth in one context may not be truth in a different context, and all realities are equally valid. Meaning is typically hidden and requires reflection through shared experiences to be discovered.”<sup>206</sup> This study will present the experiences of participating middle school choral educators as the educators state them, and infer direction for future strategies based upon their observations.

### Questions and Hypotheses

A review of the existing literature has resulted in the identification of possible relationships between block scheduling and choral ensemble enrollment challenges as well as block scheduling as an effective tool for choral education. Current literature has focused primarily on high school choral education and there is limited research on middle school choral education and the utilization of block scheduling. What is still not understood is if and how block scheduling consistently impacts choral education classes, what factors outside of scheduling

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<sup>205</sup> Finlay, “Unfolding the Phenomenological Research Process”, 180.

<sup>206</sup> Burkholder, Cox, Crawford, and Hitchcock, *Research Design and Methods: An Applied Guide for the Scholar-Practitioner*, 19.

practices may play a part in student engagement and retention, and how block scheduling may be most effectively used as a tool for developing strong choral programs. The researcher's personal experience inspired the research, which prompted the conceptual framework. And, as Burkholder et al. notes, the literature has provided "the argumentation for pursuing the research idea, and the study...is situated in relation to generating or testing theory."<sup>207</sup>

Research Question One: How common is block scheduling at the middle school level?

Determining if block scheduling is a common practice will support prior research that suggests it is a form of scheduling that continues to gain popularity in American public middle schools. If it is indeed a common practice, guidelines for how to support choral arts programs utilizing block scheduling can be more clearly defined. The researcher hypothesizes that middle school block scheduling is a growing trend in American public education and can create changes in teaching methods and student enrollment and achievement.

Research Question Two: What are the perceived adverse effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

Previous research has suggested that block scheduling can create issues of attrition and promote unequal access to arts education programs at the high school level. It has also been suggested that teaching strategies need to change to more effectively utilize the increased time and support student achievement. If these identified issues are also potential challenges at the middle school level, they need to be identified so strategies can be defined and recommended. The researcher hypothesizes that choral directors who are itinerant may experience more challenges than choral directors who serve one school. The researcher also hypothesizes students

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<sup>207</sup> Burkholder, Cox, Crawford, and Hitchcock, *Research Design and Methods : An Applied Guide for the Scholar-Practitioner*, 43.

may be adversely affected if strategies are not implemented to increase equal access to choral and arts programs.

Research Question Three: What are the perceived positive effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

Research referenced in the literature reviews also implies potential positive effects of block scheduling on arts programs. Longer class periods can enable educators to further differentiate instruction. The researcher theorizes that block scheduling can encourage deeper, more meaningful music study and allow teachers to provide students with more diverse musical experiences. Teacher burnout and stress can potentially be reduced if rehearsal time is increased and there is reduced urgency to be fully prepared for performances and assessments.

Research Question Four: What strategies could be implemented to correct the adverse effects of block scheduling on middle school programs, and what methods exist for supporting healthy retention and growth?

This last research question is perhaps the most important. Information gathered through research of previous literature and examination of choral directors' perspectives can aid in creating advocacy materials, possibly ensuring aegis for current and future educators. The researcher posits the information gathered during this study will be very useful for future research and for arts advocacy efforts.

### Participants

Participants will be at least eighteen years of age and be experienced middle school choral educators who have taught for a school that has used block scheduling for at least one year. Recently retired educators who have experience with block scheduling may also participate in the study. Participants are further identified as members of the National Association for Music

Education. Upon submission of the research request submission, NAFME identified 8,528 members who met the established criteria. Contacted participants were notified of the purpose of the study, and the possible benefits and risks associated with participation in the study. Interview participants were assigned a code to ensure confidentiality. Codes are used in the data analysis, and the researcher is the only person with knowledge of the participants' identity. Codes, recordings, and other data will be stored in a secure location.

### Setting

The status of class scheduling practices in public middle schools across the United States provides the basis for this study. Private schools may also participate. Participants will respond to a survey using Google Forms. Participation in a follow-up telephone interview will also be requested; participation in both online and telephone surveys is not required.

### Instrumentation

Two instruments will be used to complete the research and enhance the findings. One is a short online survey consisting of ten questions. The other instrument is a telephone interview consisting of eighteen questions. The online survey is used to gain a large picture of current trends in class scheduling at the middle school level across the country. Online surveys are sometimes superficial; this survey is intended to develop a broad picture. The telephone interview will allow the researcher to assess the participants' lived experiences more precisely.<sup>208</sup> To encourage participation, the online survey was limited to the following ten questions:

1. Are you a faculty member of a public or private school?
2. Are you considered a full-time or part-time educator?
3. Do you serve more than one school?

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<sup>208</sup> Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-By-Step Guide*, 52.



4. If you serve more than one school, briefly describe your schedule. Please do not include school names.
5. What classes do you teach?
6. Please identify the scheduling format used at your middle school.
7. How long has your school used block scheduling? (Please skip this question if your school uses traditional scheduling)
8. Are your choral music classes curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular?
9. If your choral music classes are curricular or co-curricular and your school uses block scheduling, has there been a change in student enrollment and retention since the schedule implementation?
10. If you have observed a change in student enrollment and retention, do you think block scheduling has influenced these changes?

For the telephone interview, a deeper probe into participant experiences will be facilitated through eighteen questions. The questions will provide the participants freedom to more explicitly illustrate examples from their experiences, make suggestions, illuminate potential hurdles, and identify helpful resources. By obtaining in-depth individual responses, the researcher can develop a plan that will be beneficial to present and future choral educators. The following eighteen questions will be used in the telephone interview:

1. How long have you worked as a middle school choral director?
2. Are your program(s) curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular?
3. (If the participant describes extra-curricular activities) What is the primary reason the performing ensemble is extra-curricular?
4. Do you feel you have support for the choral program from the administration?

5. Do you feel you have support from the district/central office staff?
6. How long has your school used the current form of class scheduling?
7. What format is currently used, and have there been alternate schedules in the past?
8. Did you work for the school prior to the transition to the current schedule?
9. Do you know what the previous choral enrollment numbers were for your school?
10. Has there been a change in enrollment after the implementation of the current schedule?
11. Did that change occur prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020?
12. In your perception, has the change, if any, increased or decreased attrition rates for the choral programs at your school?
13. If the change has increased attrition rates for the choral programs at your school, have you implemented recruiting strategies?
14. What recruiting strategies have you used that you consider most effective?
15. In your perception, has the change, if any, improved or damaged the choral programs at your school?
16. If you have a schedule that creates more extended class periods, do you feel the increased instructional time is an advantage or a disadvantage?
17. Has the change in the length of instructional time affected your teaching strategies and methods?
18. Are there any other thoughts you wish to contribute to this study on the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

## Procedures

A request for research must first be filed with the Internal Review Board, or IRB of one's institution, to be eligible for a research study. The researcher prepared and submitted a request for research application to the IRB for approval and was granted permission to proceed. Once permission was granted, the researcher identified the most effective means for obtaining research participants. The dissemination of the initial survey was determined to be through an online Google Form sent via email to eligible participants. The Google Form was set to refrain from collecting identifying information, including email addresses, ensuring anonymity.

It is easier than ever before to communicate with prospective research participants in the current digital age. In the past, it was necessary to rely on mailing lists or state representatives to obtain contact information for potential study participants. For the purposes of this study, the researcher contacted the National Association for Music Education. NAfME has streamlined their services for researchers, and currently helps with surveys. It provides research survey assistance to students and to NAfME members. One must apply for approval; once approved, NAfME will disseminate online surveys via email to the identified research population. Applications are approved by Society for Research in Music Education and members may request research assistance once every two years.

One must be a current member of the National Association for Music Education to be eligible for assistance. An IRB request for research must have already been applied for and approved before potential researchers can submit an application to the SRME. The decision of the SRME is final, however, the applicant may revise and submit their application once within a

two-year cycle.<sup>209</sup> This streamlined service makes the process of collecting survey responses much more efficient and allows researchers to sample larger populations.

#### Data Analysis

The researcher can develop an action plan that can be shared to colleges and universities, as well as school divisions across the country by employing constructivist aspects of choral directors' experiences utilizing various class schedules. This plan will aid in placing the needs of students above scheduling and financial concerns and pave the way for future student academic achievement and fulfillment. By highlighting educators' experiences with block scheduling, possible issues or challenges and advantages can be further studied in the future. Any patterns that may appear as the result of this research can aid further investigators in analyzing more specific trends in middle school block scheduling as well as possible future challenges in working with performing ensembles on a block schedule.

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<sup>209</sup> "Research", National Association for Music Education, last updated 2023, <https://nafme.org/publications-resources/research/>.

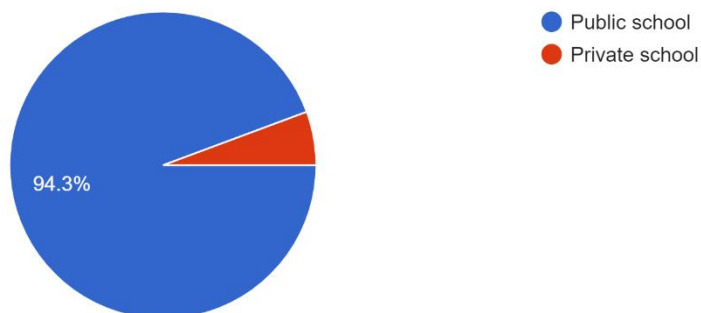
## Chapter Four: Research Findings

### Online Survey Results

A survey was created using Google Forms and disseminated to 8,528 NAFME members who met the established criteria for participation. The survey consisted of ten questions. The first question identified participants working in public schools, and participants working in private schools. Of the 53 completed responses, 94.3 percent identified as public-school educators and 5.7 percent identified as private school educators. One participant partially responded to the survey; that person identified as a public-school educator. Figure 1 demonstrates that the majority of the participants are public school educators.

Figure 1

Are you a faculty member of a public or private school?  
53 responses

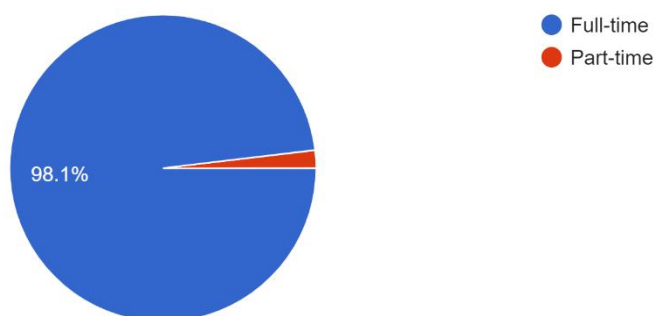


The second question sought to identify educators who were considered FTE (full-time educator) at the middle school level and those who were considered itinerant. Some choral educators in the United States serve more than one school, either due to funding challenges or additional staffing needs. Limited student access to choral programs because of staffing challenges can be further complicated by scheduling practices. Of the participant responses, 98.1

percent identified as a full-time educator. See Figure 2. This question may hve not been detailed enough to elicit the necessary response. Participants may have concluded that they are considered FTE by their school division even if they are itinerant. For example, if one is .25 FTE at the middle school level and .75 FTE at the high school level, one is considered a full-time employee. The question, as stated, therefore may have been incorrectly answered and the resultant data, as a result, is skewed.

Figure 2

Are you considered a full-time or part-time educator?  
53 responses

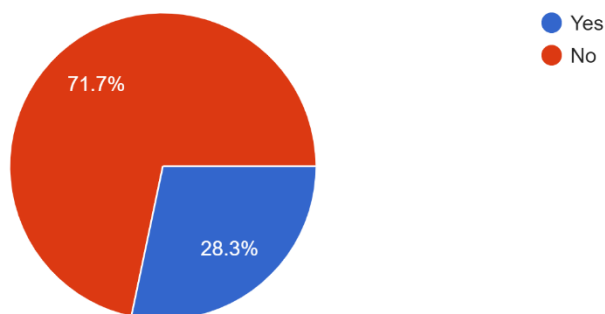


The third question may provide some clarification for the answers to the preceding question. Participants were asked if they served more than one school. 71.7 percent of the 54 participants who answered this question indicated they serve one school and 28.3 percent identified as itinerant. These percentages do not match the percentages for the preceding question and indicate that nearly one-third of respondents serve more than one school in their district.

Figure 3

Do you serve more than one school?

53 responses



Next, participants were asked to provide a brief description of their typical class schedule. There were 17 responses to this question and were widely varied. One respondent reported serving three schools: an elementary school for one class period, a middle school for three class periods, and a high school for two class periods. Another participant also reported traveling between schools: “I travel between 3 middle schools and one elementary school, serving as their choir director. Each middle school's choirs rehearse twice a week. Each middle school has a 6th choir and a 7th/8th choir that rehearse in two separate blocks. When I'm not with a middle school choir, I am teaching elementary general music/choir, middle school special education music classes, or monitoring a study hall. My schedule works out so that I'm at one school in the morning and a different one in the afternoon each day.”<sup>210</sup>

Another educator indicated they are split between elementary and middle school, teaching nineteen elementary classes during the week in addition to sixth and seventh grade choirs. The educator did not specify if the choir classes meet daily or on a set schedule to accommodate the elementary classes. One other survey participant indicated an arrangement

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<sup>210</sup> Anonymous participant, “Middle School Choral Directors’ Perspectives on Block Scheduling” survey, September 1, 2023.

between elementary and middle school. However, the educator is only teaching elementary during the school day; the middle school chorus the educator works with is after school.

One respondent to the survey indicated they were shared between three schools: two middle schools and one high school. In addition to working with choral ensembles at all schools, the respondent also identified a keyboard class as part of their schedule. Two other survey participants identified itinerant status at the middle and high school levels. For smaller districts, splitting educators between the secondary levels provides consistency in the feeder program and is often implemented as a result.

Question number four asked participants to briefly describe their schedule if they serve more than one school. They were instructed not to include school names. There were seventeen responses, as demonstrated in Figure 4.

*Figure 4*

1 period elementary, 3 periods ms, 2 periods hs
I travel between 3 middle schools and one elementary school, serving as their choir director. Each middle school's choirs rehearse twice a week. Each middle school has a 6th choir and a 7th/8th choir that rehearse in two separate blocks. When I'm not with a middle school choir, I am teaching elementary general music/choir, middle school special education music classes, or monitoring a study hall. My schedule works out so that I'm at one school in the morning and a different one in the afternoon each day.
I teach Elementary PK-5 to 19 classes and have Choir 6th & 7th grade
Each morning I teach a choir class for one period each at 2 different middle schools. I then travel to a high school where I teach a Keyboard course and a Choir ensemble.
Elementary during the school day; after school middle school choir at 3:30pm

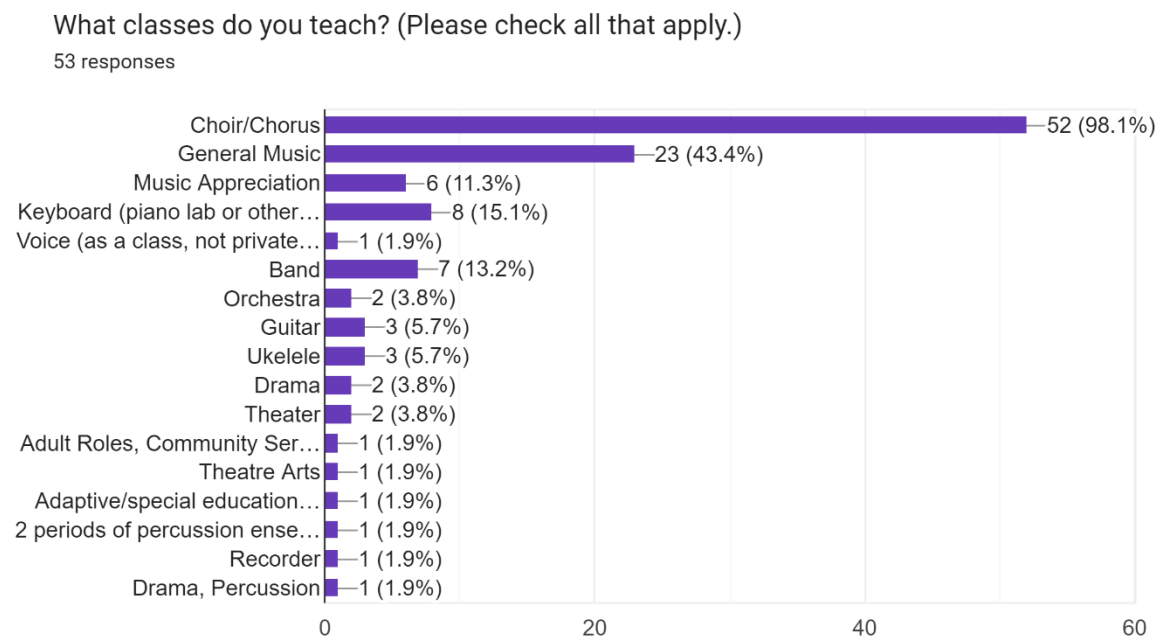


I teach three high school choir classes, and three middle school choir classes.
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6-8 Middle School Choirs and assist at the High School 9th Grade Choir
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Overall, most of the survey participants identified choir or chorus as their primary teaching assignments. 98.1 percent said they teach choral education classes, with general music classes listed as the next most taught course at 43.4 percent. Six respondents (11.3 percent) identified music appreciation as a course in their workload. For a small number of the participants, their responsibilities also include teaching courses in band, orchestra, guitar, ukelele, piano labs, recorder, percussion ensembles, or work in the theatre arts. Figure 5 demonstrates the respondent's described responsibilities. Such a division of responsibilities may be a result of staffing needs or of scheduling needs. Neither is specifically indicated and has no bearing on the outcome of this study.

Figure 5



The next question sought to identify the format of class scheduling, regardless of subject. This question did not ask for specific identification of schedules for those serving more than one school, so the information may not be correctly identified in the participants' answers. Many elementary schools operate differently from secondary schools when it comes to class scheduling because students do not change classes/teachers as often as they do in the upper grades. As a result, the information provided will be judged as primarily identifying scheduling for middle and high schools only.

The most identified schedules are that of the "traditional" schedule, which can be a six-, seven-, or eight-period day, and the A/B block schedule. 37.7 percent of the respondents identified the "traditional", or six/seven period day as the regular class schedule for the school(s) they serve, with another 26.4 percent identifying the eight-period (or zero period) day, indicating that the traditional schedule is still commonly used, despite the growing popularity of the block schedule over the past twenty years. Although the 4x4 semester block has been identified as the more popular form of block schedule by other studies (Johnson, Lowther), the participants in this study indicated the A/B block schedule is preferred; 28.3 percent of the participants identified A/B block schedule in comparison to just 9.4 percent identifying the 4x4 block schedule. An additional 9.4 percent of the responses also indicated the use of A/B block schedule in a modified format.

Another schedule that was identified as more commonly used than the 4x4 block schedule is the flex schedule. The flex schedule can provide a set time for school assemblies, club meetings, and more during the regular school day. The flex schedule may also include singleton courses. Singleton courses can also be used in the 4x4 block schedule but may be more common in flex schedules. Singleton courses can range from a few short weeks to the entire

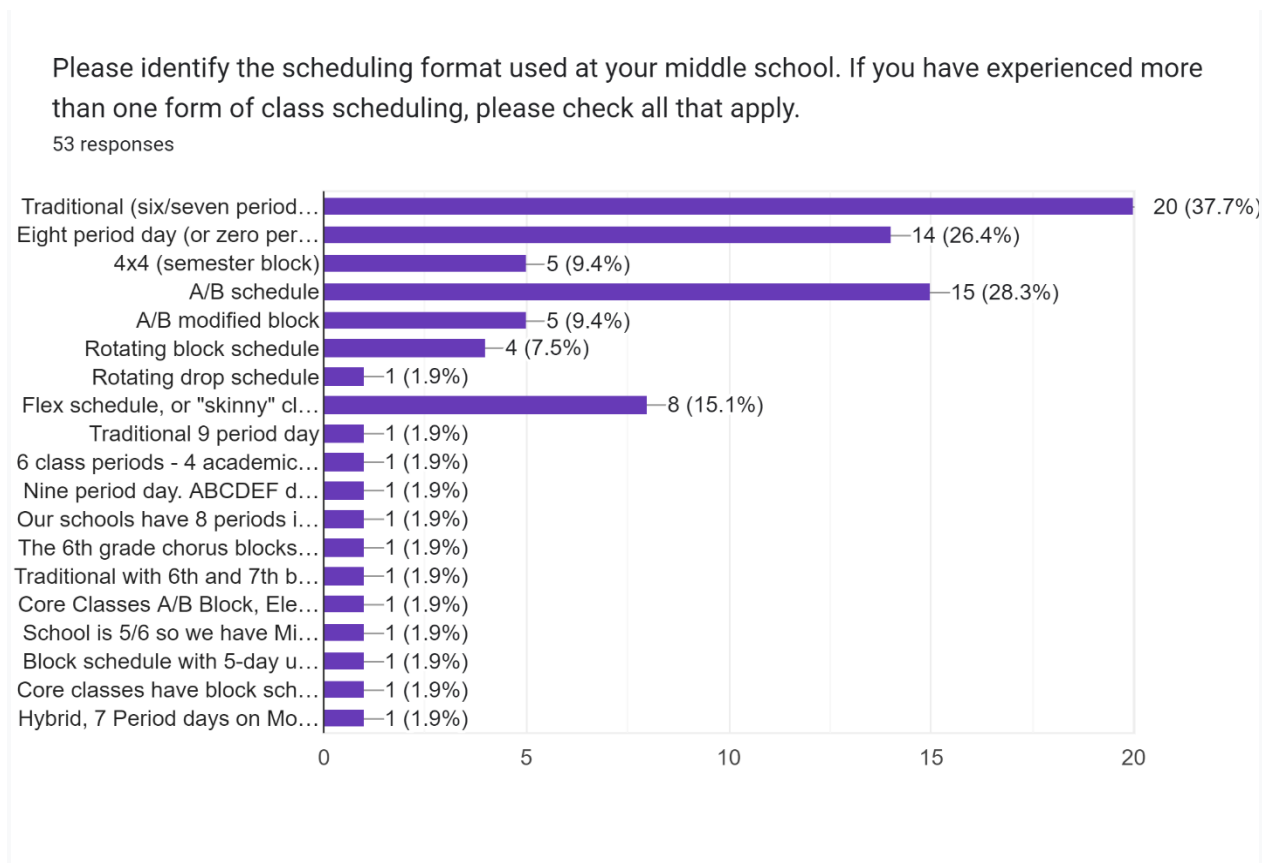
school year. 15.1 percent of the participants identified experience with flex scheduling.

Participants also recorded alternate responses to the choices listed in the question. Some of the responses indicated a variation of the traditional day, with as many as nine class periods. Others identified modifications to the A/B block schedule, the use of hybrid schedules, one participant identified a rotating block schedule (which may be a modification of the A/B block schedule), and one participant identified a rotating “drop” schedule. A rotating drop schedule may have as many as eight class periods, but students only attend five/six periods per day.<sup>211</sup> As the week progresses, classes that did not meet at the beginning of the week are added and others are dropped, so all classes meet at some point each week. One participant noted that core classes at their school met on a block schedule, but elective classes were not part of the block schedule.

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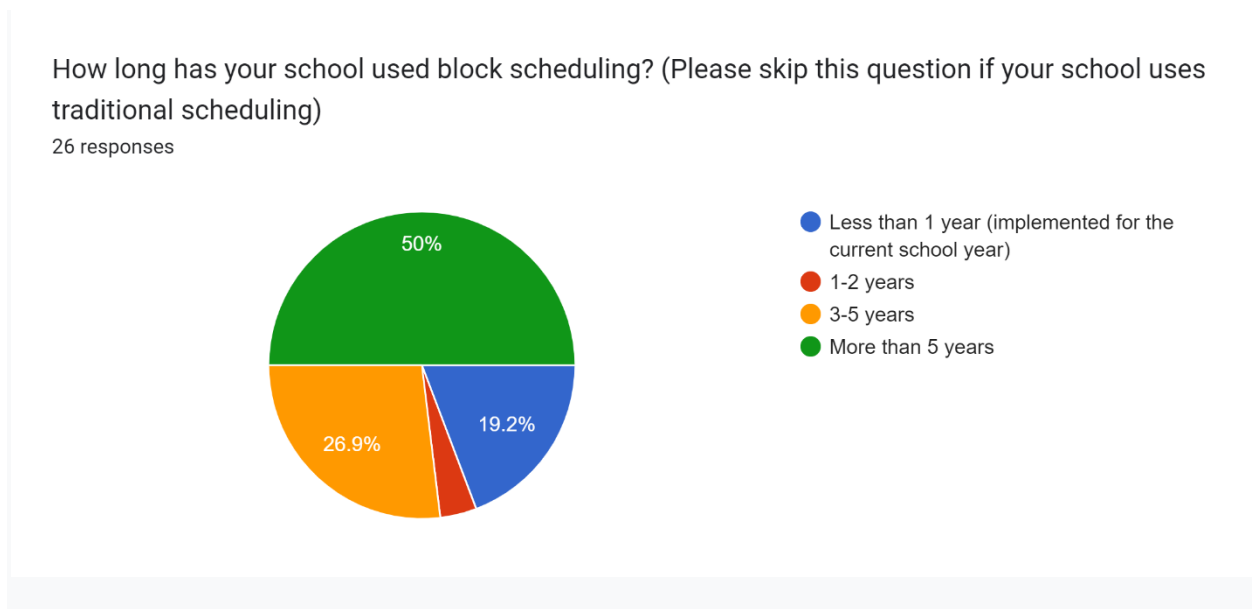
<sup>211</sup> Enriching Students, “Different Types of Flexible Schedules”, last modified 2021, <https://www.enrichingstudents.com/different-types-flexible-schedules/#:~:text=A%20Rotating%20Drop%20Schedule&text=Each%20day%20the%20rotation%20of,meet%20for%20Periods%201%2D6>.

Figure 6



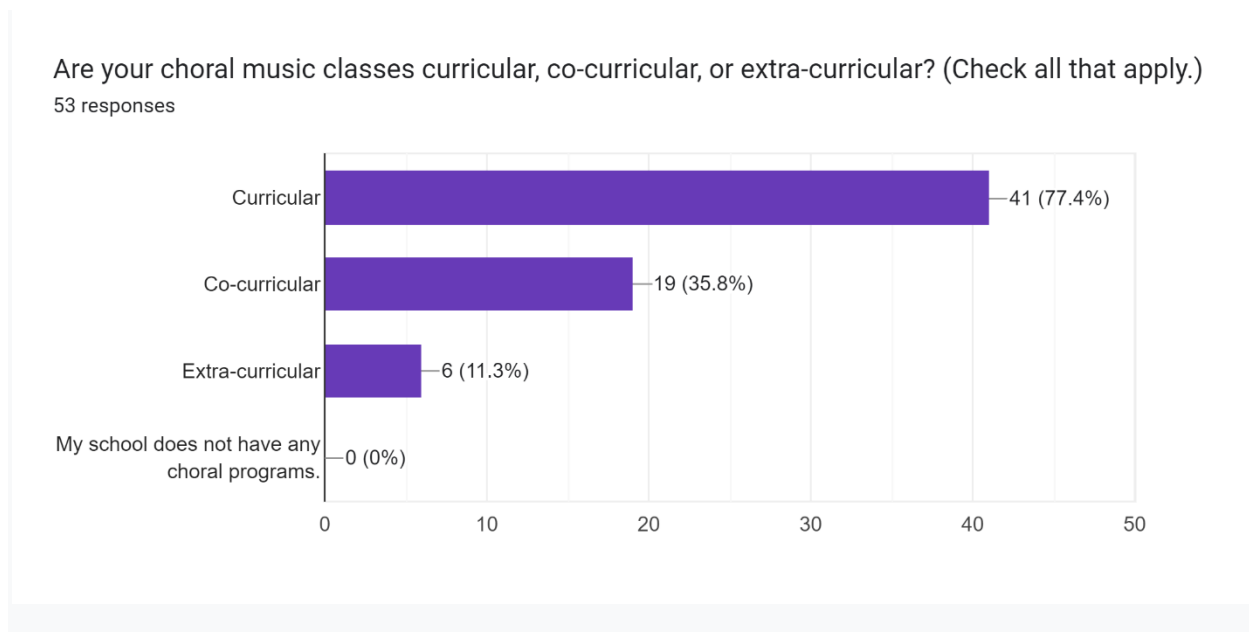
Although block scheduling has become a common practice for high schools, it is becoming increasingly popular at the middle school level as well. The information collected from the online survey supports block scheduling as a growing trend. 50 percent of the participants indicated that their respective schools have been using block scheduling for more than five years. 26.9 percent of the responses also established block scheduling as a practice for at least three years. 19.2 percent of the participants stated that the current academic school year is the first year that block scheduling has been implemented in their division and/or school. Such a large percentage supports the likelihood of block scheduling becoming a common practice at all secondary levels of public-school education.

Figure 7



In addition to many of the schools involved in the study using block scheduling, it appears that the majority also offer choral education classes during the school day. Figure 8 shows that 77.4 percent of the responses identified curricular choral education classes. 35.8 percent (or nineteen responses) were also labeled co-curricular, which indicates some of the participants answered the question with more than one response. Choral education classes can be both curricular and co-curricular so the decision to use both identification markers is correct. It is, however, unclear how many of the schools involved in the study have choral education classes that are both curricular and co-curricular. A follow-up question that would have identified classes meeting during the school day or choral performing arts ensembles as both classes and sponsored clubs would have further clarified the provided information.

Figure 8



Survey participants were then asked if a change in student enrollment and retention had occurred after block scheduling had been implemented. See Figure 9. The answers were widely varied. 25 percent indicated there had been no change in enrollment or retention, while 30.6 percent asserted that enrollment and retention had decreased. 5.6 percent of the participants believed that enrollment and retention had increased at their respective schools; 2.8 percent of the participants stated there had been no scheduling changes implemented so the question was not applicable to their situation. One other response indicated that block scheduling was not used at their school.

The remainder of the participants provided varying responses in accordance with their specific situations. One respondent remarked, “my schedule has changed to accommodate the needs of students who do not want choir for a full year, so I technically see more students, but some for only a semester.”<sup>212</sup>No further information was provided on specific scheduling practices for that school, so it is unclear whether choral education classes are offered as singleton

<sup>212</sup> Anonymous survey participant, “Choral Educators’ Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools” Survey, August 18, 2023.

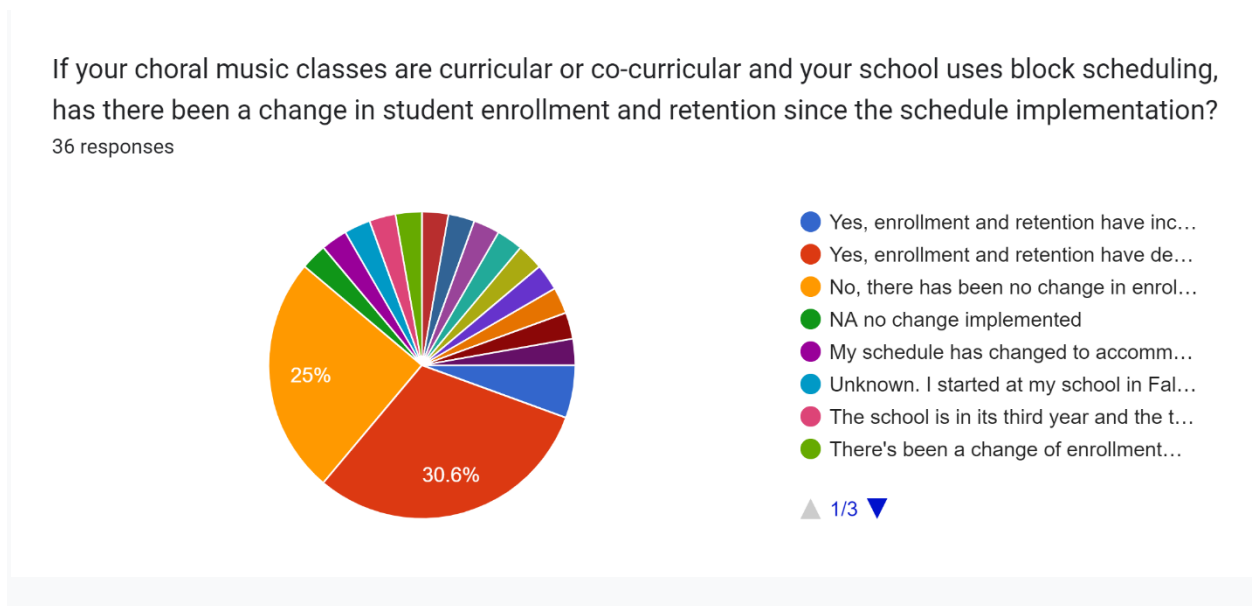
classes in addition to the semester course offerings. Another participant did not know if block scheduling was a factor in decreased student involvement in choral performing ensembles. The participant further explained: “I started at my school in Fall of 2020. I believe they started block scheduling in 2019. Numbers are down, but presumably it is due to COVID, as well as other factors.” A third response simply stated, “the school is in its third year and the term block rotation has been there from its inception.”<sup>213</sup> No further details were provided.

Other responses included identifying a change in enrollment but an assertion that block scheduling was not the cause. One response stated the following: “Previously taught a 7+intervention block schedule. Did not see decreased enrollment or retention more than usual declines and pickups from year to year.” No details were given to describe what was meant by “7+intervention block schedule;” the term intervention may be used to describe an open period, such as a study hall, that would allow students time to make up work or receive remediation. One person observed a change in retention when electives were no longer part of the block schedule and staffing remained consistent. Another noted, “When I taught at the school with block scheduling, enrollment and retention were difficult.” One also experienced difficulty because of block scheduling practices, stating “My school was only able to offer Chorus as an elective after switching back to a traditional schedule from block scheduling.” Lastly, two responses presented inability to answer the question, either because of what they determined to be insufficient data, or as one stated, “I have taught block scheduling for 13 of my 14 years. It's hard to speculate enrollment changes after year one.”

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<sup>213</sup>Anonymous survey participant, “Choral Educators’ Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools” Survey, August 18, 2023.

Figure 9



Participants were then asked their opinion directly about block scheduling and whether they believed student enrollment and retention was affected because of its implementation. 38.7 percent said yes, nearly aligning with the percentage of responses from the previous question that determined a change in enrollment and retention in choral education classes. 22.6 percent negated block scheduling as a possible influence on student enrollment and retention, also closely aligning with numbers from the previous question indicating that a change in enrollment and retention had not been observed since the schedule implementation. Finally, 16.1 percent rated their response as maybe; this demonstrates the possibility that other factors may be influencing enrollment and retention rates in middle school choral programs.

As with the previous question, other responses varied and provided specific feedback. See Figure 10. For example, one participant expressed a preference for traditional schedules. “Switching from block scheduling to transitional 7 periods has drastically INCREASED enrollment, student retention, and curriculum retention. I am so thankful my district moved away



from block scheduling. From my experience block scheduling kills arts programs.”<sup>214</sup> Despite the small number of participants in the survey, the experiences with school schedules appeared to be widely varied. In another observation, one respondent expressed challenges students face in a traditional 8-period schedule. The survey participant stated:

Even though we have a traditional 8 block schedule, retention in middle school choir in my district is significantly affected by scheduling. Since band/choir/orchestra are electives, they happen within what's called a "Flex" block. All students who aren't in band/choir/orchestra get an extra study hall to get homework done or socialize with their friends while our students are in our rehearsals. This causes many students to drop out of our ensembles for the sake of gaining back homework completion time or time with their peers.<sup>215</sup>

Another participant observed challenges students face with finding room in their schedule, saying, “[while] we are on periods, our school is blocking some subjects by assigning two periods to those subjects, causing limited room for ‘electives’ in student schedules.”<sup>216</sup> One final observation was made about the length of classes in schedules like the 4x4 block. The participant opined, “I believe block scheduling is entirely too long for the average middle schooler. They get tired and bored too quickly and it's hard to keep them fully engaged for a 90-minute block.”<sup>217</sup>

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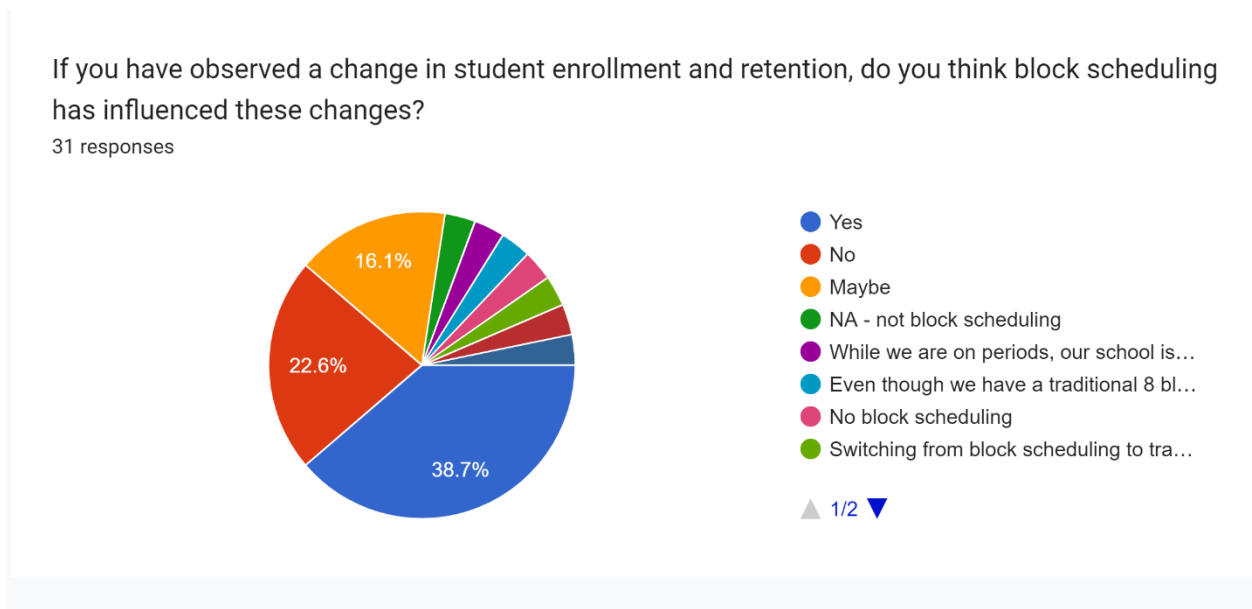
<sup>214</sup> Anonymous survey participant, “Choral Educators’ Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools” Survey, August 18, 2023.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Anonymous survey participant, “Choral Educators’ Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools” Survey, September 25, 2023.

Figure 10



### Telephone Interviews

Along with the online survey, a request for a follow-up interview was included. The request for a telephone interview was sent to 8,528 identified NAfME members who met the criteria for participation. Two middle school choral directors responded. The consent form was sent electronically to the potential participants; both participants signed and returned the forms. Email communication was used to set up the telephone interview dates and times. The participants' phone numbers were collected for the purpose of contacting for the interview, and once the interviews were concluded, telephone numbers as well as all email communications were deleted. The interviews were transcribed and can be found in their entirety in Appendix F. Recordings are stored on a flash drive according to the protocols established in the IRB approval process.

The two participants were asked a series of eighteen questions concerning their work as a middle school choral director and their experience with block scheduling. Participants will be

identified as Participant A and Participant B while sharing the information collected from each. Names of participants have been redacted to ensure anonymity. For convenience, Participant A will be abbreviated “PA” and Participant B will be abbreviated “PB.” One educator works for a school that has implemented block scheduling within the past school year. This individual teaches general music classes and works with an extracurricular choral performing ensemble. The other educator involved in the study has primarily taught for schools that use a 4x4 block schedule.

The following is a breakdown of each participant’s responses to the eighteen questions asked during the telephone interview:

1. How long have you worked as a middle school choral director?

PA: Uh, thirteen years.

PB: Since 2003, so 20 years.

2. Are your program(s) curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular?

PA: Uh...for choir? Um, I guess extra-curricular.

PB: Umm, initially, it was only after school and then it was co-curricular and then it was curricular and, and chorally now it's non-existent. Well, I take that back. My eighth grade would be, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm not speaking. My eighth grade, umm, would, will be umm, curricular.

3. (If the participant describes extra-curricular activities) What is the primary reason the performing ensemble is extra-curricular?

PA: Because my reason for that being an extra-curricular is because I am able to have students come in when their schedules are not in conflict with other classes.

PB: Because they would not schedule chorus during the school day, umm, because they needed me to teach a larger number of students and, umm, more rotations with other exploratories. And the numbers weren't at that moment, the numbers weren't large enough for me to just teach in the, just teach chorus course during the school day.

4. Do you feel you have support for the choral program from the administration?

PA: Um. Yes.

PB: I have verbal support. I don't actually have scheduling support.

5. Do you feel you have support from the district/central office staff?

PA: Uh, no. I won't have to explain, am I? Ha! I don't feel like they're involved.

PB: I have not been active with the district, but are you talking about like our county, or are you talking about the overall district.

Researcher: Your county.

PB: Okay. Our county. With our county, again, I think that there's a dream out there for all of our programs to have in the county to have middle school choral programs, but there's not been anybody to mandate that scheduling or, you know, to even encourage our building administration to block that time and to protect that, that, umm, opportunity for our students. We don't get the same support that I feel like other programs, for instance, band, gets. Band's time is protected, and, umm, by the scheduling, but I don't feel like my time has ever been protected by the scheduling.

6. How long has your school used the current form of class scheduling?

PA: Yes. So, umm, one year.

PB: Yeah, we switched to block. I'm trying to remember when we switched to block.

Umm...I want to say that it's been about 10 years, maybe a little less, maybe I'm just

trying to remember because I've also moved locations several times, so I'm trying to connect it to that, and I have had several administrators through that time. I'm at least on my third administrator since block scheduling, was instituted with the middle school program.

7. What format is currently used, and have there been alternate schedules in the past?

PA: Yes. I don't know what you would call that schedule.

Researcher: I think it would probably be a traditional schedule?

PA: Well, I just found out that exploratories...one of the exploratories were split between the grades. So, interim teachers would have all grades.

Researcher: Okay. So, you would say at least five years?

PB: Yes, absolutely.

Researcher: And, umm. This is block scheduling, have there been alternate schedules in the past?

PB: Yes. And initially, when I started with this middle school, I was on an AB weeks and I alternated every week, but I kept the same students. I'm pretty sure I kept them for the entire year, which allowed me to develop greater rapport with the students, and you know, so then I was teaching in small clusters, and then putting them together for large, large events.

8. Did you work for the school prior to the transition to the current schedule?

PA: Yes.

PB: At the high school. At the high school level, I've always worked there, and that's been block scheduling. My entire teaching career.

9. Do you know what the previous choral enrollment numbers were for your school?

PA: Umm, it varied. Somewhat. It depended on student interest.

PB: Umm, when I was teaching chorus here, I had a 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade chorus. My numbers were, I had like 20-some 6th graders. Umm, one time, I had 30 7th graders, and I don't know, maybe 20, 25 8th graders? So. I still didn't have them for the whole year. You know, when I was teaching chorus, I just had them one semester. And then it would be a different group the next semester.

10. Has there been a change in enrollment after the implementation of the current schedule?

PA: Umm...Yes, but I'm also looking at other factors such as the way COVID affected it.

PB: Yes. That has changed, but also, chorus, has changed. It's no longer-except for 8th graders-it's no longer during the day. So, my numbers range from 15-24 students in class, but now it's, 6th and 7th grade is general music or music appreciation, music exploratory.

11. Did that change occur prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020?

Researcher: Okay. So, the next question was, did that change occur prior to the COVID pandemic of 2020? So, that would be no, right?

PA: Right.

Researcher: You've only been in it for a year.

PA: Right.

PB: Well, I had chorus prior to the pandemic. So, so yes, I mean, it happened. It, it happened on return.

12. In your perception, has the change, if any, increased or decreased attrition rates for the choral programs at your school?

PA: I don't believe so. Not with it being extra-curricular.

PB: No, no. I don't think there's really been a change in that because I'm not teaching chorus, except for 8th graders. And my 8th graders last year were very much into singing with me. So, I don't know what will happen this year with 8th graders. Because that's the other thing. I don't think these students know they're supposed to be in chorus. I think they're just thinking their music. That's it.

13. If the change has increased attrition rates for the choral programs at your school, have you implemented recruiting strategies?

If the change has increased attrition rates, have you implemented recruiting strategies?

So, you said there wasn't really any change.

PA: No.

PB: Mainly word of mouth and talking with individual students. You know. I, I seek out students that I know that enjoy singing and would like to be a part of a performing arts group. So, it's, that's the recruiting strategy. I mean, sometimes it's literally going to like the cafeteria where they're all in there at lunch and saying, hey, who would like to sign up for chorus? And that's also the way that I got students to stay after school back in the day when I was trying to prove the worth of having an in-school program. I would go and...and talk to them in large groups when they had, you know, class meetings, or lunch.

14. What recruiting strategies have you used that you consider most effective?

PA: Umm, face-to-face communication? Umm, enrollment, like, how would you call that? Face-to-face recruitment.

PB: Mainly word of mouth and talking with individual students. You know. I, I seek out students that I know that enjoy singing and would like to be a part of a performing arts

group. So, it's, that's the recruiting strategy. I mean, sometimes it's literally going to like the cafeteria where they're all in there at lunch and saying, hey, who would like to sign up for chorus? And that's also the way that I got students to stay after school back in the day when I was trying to prove the worth of having an in-school program. I would go and...and talk to them in large groups when they had, you know, class meetings, or lunch.

PB: Oh, I'm sure that there are. But that's not. I'm not. Those are the ones I've used. So, I think they have been effective. So, um.

15. In your perception, has the change, if any, improved or damaged the choral programs at your school?

PA: I don't believe it has affected it really. Yeah, it is harder for me because we've only had it for one year.

PB: I think it damages it. You do not, you don't have the opportunity to, at least the way the scheduling is here. Don't have the opportunity to, to maintain the same students throughout the course of a year. So, that doesn't help you to develop a relationship or to develop the student's skillset. And then it's easier for them to lose interest.

16. If you have a schedule that creates more extended class periods, do you feel the increased instructional time is an advantage or a disadvantage?

PA: I would say neither because I'm extra-curricular.

Researcher: What about your general music classes, did they change in length when you changed to block schedule or are they 45 minutes?

PA: They stayed the same.



PB: Well, if I were teaching chorus, I think having, you know, because I have basically a forty-five-minute block with these students. And if I were teaching chorus with middle schoolers, to have an hour might would be beneficial or helpful, but to have them in class for forty-five minutes would, would be great. If I had them every day all year long, that would be phenomenal. But, you know, because the middle school voice is also less mature. So, really being able to sing much more than that is, probably not in the best interest of the student.

17. Has the change in the length of instructional time affected your teaching strategies and methods?

PA: No.

PB: It's affected what I teach. It's not affected in the methods per se, but I mean, my time frame, my time frames didn't change. The block scheduling affected the time frame for the core classes. So, it did not change how long I have students in class. My time frame is the same at the middle school. As it was prior to block scheduling, I just...I switched student groups more frequently, so.

18. Are there any other thoughts you wish to contribute to this study on the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

PA: I would say that for many teachers who teach choir, um, curricularly? Umm, I'm not sure if that's correct. That it would hurt their programs because they're missing a grade. One of the grades.

Researcher: Do you think that would be...you're talking about the...in your district and that you're shared between schools. So, you said that that would be...that would be a detriment because of the scheduling change. Is that what you're saying?

PA: Yes, yes, because we're, we're not here to see the other grades. So, we're going to miss one of the sixth through eighth grades.

Researcher: Do you think that would cause a problem? You said... it would...

PA: Yes. It would hurt the program overall. And it would hurt not only the middle school but the high school program.

PB: Well, personally, I think block scheduling is a disservice to our students in general, regardless of the choral prog, irregardless of the choral program, or band program, or...or any other specific umm, extra-cur...extra activity, I don't think it's beneficial for our students as a parent or as a teacher, our students and their core subject matter. Kids only get, it's like one semester of science, or one semester of history. They don't get it all year long. And I don't think, for the most part, I don't think the average teacher is capable of teaching like a 90-minute block and be effective with it. I think the kids are, it's the same teaching methods as before, and the kids are given extra time to complete their homework at school. So, that's been my experience. Both as a parent, as a grandparent now, and as a co-worker. Ha! So...I...I have opposed block scheduling, even at the high school level, for as long as I can remember. So.

Researcher: And you are not alone in that perception. There are a few folks, according to the research I've done, that agree with you on that particular point.

PB: I think it's a disservice to our students, bottom line, and if we're supposed to be about helping and educating our students, why do we continue to give them a disservice? I mean, I don't know the answer. And I know this is all recorded, too, but the answer is that it's financially feasible. It's better for our school systems. They can hire less teachers. And they can get the job done per se, quote/unquote job done, with less, less personnel. And

that means financial savings for them. And I don't think it's the best...best plan for our kids.

### Summary

An online survey was presented to 8,528 middle school choral educators who met the criteria to participate. The participants had to be eighteen years of age or older and had to be licensed, experienced middle school choral educators. Of the qualified participants, 54 educators responded. 53 of the 54 participants gave complete responses. Most of the participants served primarily as choral educators for their respective schools, while others taught choral education courses in addition to general music or other music electives. At least half of the participants served more than one school, and the split occurred between elementary and middle schools as well as between middle and high schools. More than half of the participants served schools with traditional schedules; however, a variety of school schedules was represented, with some form of block scheduling comprising nearly half of the surveyed schools. Participants expressed challenges faced by scheduling changes but did not unanimously identify block scheduling as a detriment. Neither was there a general agreement that block scheduling is advantageous to choral education classes. The information provided by the participants did, however, illuminate how diverse scheduling practices are from one division to another.

The interview participants provided a more detailed picture of choral directors' experiences with block scheduling. For one of the educators, block scheduling at the middle school level had been implemented for one complete school year at the time of the interview. The scheduling change did not affect the participant's choral program because that program is run solely as an extracurricular club. The other participant had longer experience with block scheduling, both at the middle and high school levels. The participant observed that choral

classes had been largely eliminated at the middle school level due to scheduling changes and expressed the opinion that block scheduling was detrimental to choral and other performing arts programs.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions

### Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of choral educators currently working at the middle school level in schools utilizing block scheduling. The first chapter of the study examined the potential need for conducting research into the subject of block scheduling in middle schools. To begin this examination, a brief recounting of the history of American public education and a determination of the origins of public-school reform was formulated. The desire to be academically and technologically competitive arose during the era of the Cold War and the Space Race. The U.S. government began to focus on the concept of time because it had been determined that the length of time spent studying a particular subject proved crucial.

While numerous scheduling practices have been experimented with and utilized across the United States, a uniform system does not exist. While the federal government provides guidelines, each individual state has the autonomy to set policy on factors such as time spent in the classroom. Individual school divisions are provided with parameters and can determine what class scheduling should be used to meet the state standards. As a result, class scheduling can be widely varied from division to division throughout a particular state.

The use of block scheduling or determining blocks of time that are considered more useful for student learning and focus on students' needs became popular in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arising in the 1990s, partially as a response to federal statements and policies such as *A Nation at Risk* and the No Child Left Behind Act, block scheduling is now a common practice at the secondary level. It is unclear currently how common block scheduling is at the middle school in particular. Music educators have been examining the effects of block scheduling, specifically the 4x4 or semester block schedule, since the late 1990s. The intent of

this study was to examine the perceptions of middle school choral educators, the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral performance programs, to develop advocacy materials, and to collect pertinent information to assist future educators teaching on a block schedule.

### Summary of Findings and Prior Research

This study elaborates upon earlier research on block scheduling. While some research, such as that performed by Lowther, Miles, and Blocher indicates block scheduling has little to no effect on student attrition and enrollment, other research, such as that performed by Meidl, indicates the contrary. In the first chapter, the potential effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs were explored. School reform has initiated the need to identify time and how time may determine student achievement and academic success. Although block schedules such as the 4x4 or semester block have existed at the high school level since the 1990s, its presence at the middle school level has not been largely identified to date. There is evidence of literature examining the perceived effects of block scheduling on arts education programs, but there is currently little extant literature specifically studying the impact block scheduling has had on choral arts programs.

In chapter two, a review of the existing literature concerning block scheduling and music education emphasized several key challenges and advantages. First, one of the major issues with changing from traditional schedules to block scheduling is teacher training. If teachers do not change the way they teach when presented with a longer class period, the effectiveness of block scheduling is reduced: students become bored and extra time is left for completing homework rather than being utilized for instruction. Teachers need training in differentiated instruction and

need to be provided resources for building effective courses to promote student success and engagement.

Another issue highlighted in the literature was that of student attrition and unavailability of courses. For teachers who serve more than one school, they may only be available during one class period. This reduction in availability creates unequal access to the course, especially if students are taking advanced placement/honors classes, or remediation classes. In a 4x4 semester block schedule, taking a choral music class or other arts education class requires the student to give up 25 percent of their schedule for the entire year or experience lengthy gaps in the progress of their education. Students feel like they cannot participate because there is “no room” in their schedule. This encourages the use of extracurricular activities to offset the imbalance often experienced in performing arts ensembles when student enrollment is sporadic. In some situations, this may prove detrimental to the program if the division is experiencing financial constraints. If the program can be offered after school, it may be deemed no longer necessary to include in the curriculum.

Advantages were also identified in the existing literature on block scheduling. Having more time in class allows teachers to diversify. It no longer becomes a race to prepare for the next performance and allows students to potentially explore more difficult choral literature. It also provides more diverse musical experiences and enables students to develop a deeper understanding of music and its role in their lives and the world in which they live. While some educators perceive longer rehearsals as detrimental, especially for wind players and vocal students, the right strategies for using the given time effectively need to be implemented, eliminating such an issue.

In chapter three the methodology of the study was explored. It was determined the most effective means of establishing beneficial information for future researchers and for current and future choral music educators was to conduct a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study of the perceived effects of block scheduling. 8,528 eligible participants were identified and sent a short, ten question online survey. A further request for participants for a more detailed telephone interview was included in the research request email. The online survey was presented using a Google Form and did not collect identifying information. The request for research email, including the link to the online survey and information for the telephone interview was disseminated by the National Association for Music Education on the researcher's behalf. Of the 8,528 identified eligible participants, 53 completed responses to the online survey were recorded. Most of the participants were full-time public-school educators. The answers provided established that schedules continue to be widely varied across the United States. The traditional schedule, such as the six-, seven-, or eight-period day continues to be favored but block scheduling is commonly used as well.

The overall perception of block scheduling was mixed; some participants felt it was an advantage to their program while others identified serious issues with attrition and student enrollment. One response indicated that the longer class period made it more difficult to teach and highlighted the need for teacher training when divisions implement scheduling changes, especially if the change is from a traditional schedule to the 4x4 block schedule. Without educators changing their approach to their teaching methods and strategies, there will continue to be increased stress and teacher burnout when implementing block schedules.

For the telephone interview, two participants out of the 8,528 contacted indicated an interest. The telephone interviews were scheduled through email communication between the



researcher and the two participants. Signatures were collected from the participants and stored with the recorded materials in the identified location listed in the IRB application. Aside from telephone numbers, no further identifying information was collected from the participants. Participants were identified in the research as Participant A (PA) and Participant B (PB). The researcher called the participants at the agreed upon time. A script was used to introduce the interview and reason for research. The participants were asked a series of eighteen questions and the conversations were recorded using an audio recording device. The audio files were stored on the recording device and the device was placed in a secured location according to the parameters set by the IRB approval.

Experiences with block scheduling were presented by an established middle school choral director with thirteen years of experience and a veteran middle school choral director with twenty years of experience. Both participants were full-time educators split between one middle school and one high school. It was determined that attrition rates and student enrollment were not adversely affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, which established a baseline for how block scheduling may affect student participation in choral programs.

One of the educators (PA) did not teach choral music classes in the regular schedule; instead, PA felt they had better control of the program if it was an extracurricular program, choosing to teach only general music in the curriculum. PA's school had adopted the 4x4 block schedule the previous year, but it had no effect on the educator's choral program or on the other electives. Participant B had experienced 4x4 block scheduling their entire career at the high school level and for at least five years at the middle school level. The change to block scheduling changed PB's rotation from middle to high school and eliminated choral education programs for sixth and seventh grades. Although both participants felt they had verbal support for their

programs from their administrators, they did not perceive further support regarding scheduling or financial issues. They also both felt under-supported at the division level. PB noted that band programs were “protected” more and opined that such protection was not just financial but also curricular.

PB also believed that their division’s decision to move to block scheduling was possibly financially based. Prior to the implementation at the high school level, each middle school (junior high) and high school had a full-time educator. The positions would be reduced to .25 FTE at the high school level and .75 FTE at the middle school level, reducing student access to both choral and band education classes. PB also expressed the opinion that 90-minute classes were too long for choral education classes, particularly for middle school changing voices. Both participants expressed concerns with gaps in student learning potentially caused by block scheduling. PA noted that for itinerant teachers it could mean one grade at the middle school not having access to choral education because the schedule would eliminate the teacher’s presence during the elective block. PB also observed that the semester block presents extended gaps in student enrollment in all classes, core and elective, increasing chances of learning loss.

#### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, most notably the small population presented. Of the 8,528 identified eligible participants, only 54 responded, of which 53 provided complete responses. There are several factors that played a role in the lack of response to the online survey. One possible factor is the time of year at which it was sent to the population. The emailed request for research assistance was sent out towards the beginning of the academic year, which may have proved to be a busy time for many educators and the emails may have been overlooked or forgotten. Another factor influencing response is the large number of research

requests that educators now receive. NAfME is providing an excellent service to researchers, but it may be inundating educators with numerous requests. Although the online survey took only a few minutes to complete, it is the researcher's own experience that sometimes the surveys are more time consuming than they are presented. Participant B even said that they overlooked the initial email because they receive so many and usually do not bother with them. If it had not been for the follow-up email that the researcher invested in, the second telephone interview participant may not have been secured.

Other limitations of this study include the questions themselves. Some of the information collected was skewed because of inadequate clarity of the questions. Callingham and Hay note that “[e]ven in a well-designed study with a sound theoretical focus, however, the data collected may not provide the desired insight into the topic.”<sup>218</sup> The questions were answered in varying ways, and it was difficult at the time of the survey creation to address all potential complications. It is recommended that any replication of this study include more probing questions to determine the educators' role if they are teaching at only one school or are split between two or more schools. Finally, the use of the telephone interview may have been prohibitive for some participants. In this digital age, many are accustomed to communicating via text or email and phone calls are no longer the norm for younger generations. Providing personal information like telephone numbers may have also played a role in the lack of participation. Finally, the length of time for the telephone interview may have been construed as too much of an investment for little or no perceived benefit. It is recommended that a group study or perhaps a lengthier survey be used in the future if researchers choose to replicate this study. Finally, while the Google Form allowed for a streamlined product and facility of use, prospective participants may have been

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<sup>218</sup> David Kember and Michael Corbett, eds., *Structuring the Thesis: Matching Method, Paradigm, Theories and Findings*. (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 30.

concerned about email addresses or other identifying information being collected, even though the researcher indicated this option was turned off in the Google Form settings. It may prove more beneficial to use Qualtrics or another professional survey company if future researchers choose to replicate this study.

#### Recommendations for Future Study

Future study recommendations include the study of divisions or states, as the current study was meant to be national. There may be greater participation at a smaller level. It may also prove beneficial to survey school administrators and division personnel to determine awareness of challenges and advantages presented to choral arts education programs utilizing block scheduling. This study has contributed to the body of literature examining block scheduling and its possible influences on music education, but more study is needed to determine its value for music educators and future challenges. It is recommended that this study be replicated to determine its validity and to add to the literature. It is also necessary to determine what, if any, training is provided to educators at all levels when schools adopt new forms of scheduling. Like any other change in the way students are educated, it is imperative that educators are provided applicable and efficient strategies to ensure student academic achievement, success, and engagement. As Williams states, “[i]t is essential that we offer engaging, relevant, and meaningful musical experiences for all students that also allow them to develop lifelong musical skills.”<sup>219</sup> It is imperative that educators find a way for the school schedule to work for all subjects to ensure students have equal access to the quality education they deserve.

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<sup>219</sup> Williams, “The Elephant in the Room”, *Music Educators Journal*. 98, no. 1 (2011), 53.

### Implications for Practice

The implications of this research are that there are varying factors in student enrollment and attrition in choral education programs as well as how time is perceived by administrators and educators alike. The previous research is supported by the outcomes of this research. What remains to be determined is if scheduling practices will continue to change, and if so, how will educators and students adapt to those changes? To assist with current and future challenges, the following strategies have been developed.

1. **Communication is imperative.**

Educators who serve schools where block scheduling is already utilized should communicate with administrators and guidance counselors. Developing a good relationship with guidance counselors can be advantageous. Obtain permission to be part of the class scheduling process and take an active role in it. This will aid in student enrollment and recruitment. Ask questions and address concerns to administrators. They may not be aware that the schedule is causing issues with the choral program. Seek out other choral directors working with block schedules and ask for advice. Request professional development time to go and observe others middle school or high school choral educators to aid in developing a plan for future strategies.

2. **Everyone should be involved.**

If the school or division is considering adopting a new schedule, everyone should be involved. That includes students, parents, teachers, and administrators. One of the identified factors in block scheduling challenges is the lack of involvement from stakeholders, especially students and teachers. Teachers should be proactive and ask

questions. Form an arts task force for the division and develop a strategic arts plan. Provide stakeholders with an annual assessment of the arts programs in the division. This can identify advantages of having arts education programs as well as expose extant issues. For assistance with developing assessment, arts task force, and strategic arts plan, Dr. John Benham's *Music Advocacy: Moving from Survival to Vision* is an excellent resource. If the division has an arts supervisor, they may also prove to be an asset in collecting information, providing support, and facilitating meetings.

**3. Teacher training is key to student success.**

One of the glaring issues emphasized by previous research as well as the current study is that divisions sometimes implement scheduling changes without training educators on how to effectively use the new schedule. It is imperative that a professional development plan be adopted to promote a successful transition to the new schedule. When educators are afforded the skills to be more effective, student engagement and achievement is more likely to occur. If educators use the same teaching strategies for a 90-minute class they developed for a 45-minute class, student engagement and benefit from increased available time on task is diminished. Block scheduling can provide many benefits, including allowing students access to real-world applications, deeper analysis of content, and more meaningful learning experiences.

**4. Decisions should always be student-centered.**

No matter what schedule is determined to be the best for a particular division, all decisions should remain student-centered. If increased time on task does not prove beneficial to students, block scheduling should not continue to be utilized because it is financially advantageous. Decisions such as changing class schedules should include

students, parents, and all stakeholders and should not be relegated to a school board meeting. Students should also not be made to feel they have to make a choice between obtaining advanced degrees and obtaining a well-rounded education through exploring electives that allow them self-expression and exploration.

### Summary

Change is never easy, and, in certain circumstances, may prove unnecessary. It is not the role of this study to decide the efficacy of block scheduling, but it is necessary to determine advantages and challenges so that future opportunities for students to participate in choral music education can be identified and implemented. The materials developed from the course of this research will perhaps assist current and future choral educators with providing beneficial, meaningful choral education experiences to their students. It is also the hope that future researchers will benefit from this work. Ultimately it is imperative that students' needs be identified and addressed in all aspects of education. It is recommended that further research be conducted on this matter to further develop future student engagement and achievement in choral music education. Arts educators, parents, administrators, and school divisions should remain focused on determining schedules that best fit the needs of all students and persist in working together to support and enable student academic achievement, social responsibility, and personal development.

## Appendix A

Dear Middle School Choral Educators:

I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Music at Liberty University and am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Music Education degree. The purpose of my research is to examine choral educators' perceptions of the effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs to assist with the development of advocacy materials, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and experienced, licensed middle school choral educators currently serving a middle school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an anonymous, online survey. It should take approximately ten minutes to complete the survey. Participation in the survey is voluntary and completely anonymous; no personal, identifying information will be collected, including email addresses.

For participants who would like to further contribute to the research, I would like to interview ten volunteers. The interview will be conducted via telephone and only participants' phone numbers and names will be collected. This information will be kept confidential and only for codification purposes. Names and phone numbers will not be published in the study. The phone interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes and will be audio recorded.

If you are interested in participating in the telephone interview, please contact me at [hsanderson5@liberty.edu](mailto:hsanderson5@liberty.edu) to schedule the interview.

A consent document for the online survey is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Because participation in the survey is anonymous, you do not need to sign and return this consent document. After you have read the consent form, please click the link below to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

To participate in the online survey, please click [here](#).

For those interested in the phone interview, an additional consent document will be sent via email after the interview has been scheduled. This consent document contains additional information about my study and the interview process in addition to information on the survey procedure. If you choose to participate in the interview, you will need to sign that consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Best wishes to you and your students for a successful close to the 2022/2023 school year.

Sincerely,

Heather Perryman  
Doctoral candidate, School of Music, Liberty University



## Appendix B

### Survey Consent

**Title of the Project:** Choral Educators' Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools

**Principal Investigator:** Heather Perryman, Doctoral Candidate, School of Music, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and currently work as a licensed educator in middle school choral education. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The study aims to explore teacher perceptions of the effects of block scheduling, observe perceived challenges and advantages associated with block scheduling, and assist with developing advocacy strategies and materials.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

Complete an online survey consisting of ten questions. The completion of this survey should take ten minutes or less.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include developing advocacy materials and adding to the existing literature about block scheduling and the performing arts.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses to the online survey will be anonymous.
- Data will be downloaded and stored on a secured flash drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser.

Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Perryman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at

██████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jerry Leonard Newman, at ██████████.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print or save a copy of the document for your records. Please do so prior to the final submission on the Google form. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

## Appendix C

### Choral Educators' Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools Survey Questions

Heather Perryman

Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time prior to submitting your answers. If you choose to withdraw from the survey, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

1. Are you a faculty member of a public or private school?
2. Are you considered a full-time or part-time educator?
3. Do you serve more than one school?
4. If you serve more than one school, briefly describe your schedule. Please do not include school names.
5. What classes do you teach?
6. Please identify the scheduling format used at your middle school.
7. How long has your school used block scheduling? (Please skip this question if your school uses traditional scheduling)
8. Are your choral music classes curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular?
9. If your choral music classes are curricular or co-curricular and your school uses block scheduling, has there been a change in student enrollment and retention since the schedule implementation?
10. If you have observed a change in student enrollment and retention, do you think block scheduling has influenced these changes?

## Appendix D

### Interview Consent

**Title of the Project:** Choral Educators' Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools

**Principal Investigator:** Heather Perryman, Doctoral Candidate, School of Music, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and currently work as a licensed educator in middle school choral education. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The study aims to explore teacher perceptions of the effects of block scheduling, observe perceived challenges and advantages associated with block scheduling, and assist with developing advocacy strategies and materials.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be included in the second part of this study, I will ask you to do the following:

Participate in a telephone interview with the researcher, Heather Perryman. The telephone interview will consist of ten questions designed to observe your experiences with block scheduling as a middle school choral educator. The completion of the phone interview should take thirty minutes or less. This interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only.

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include developing advocacy materials and adding to the existing literature about block scheduling and the performing arts.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Participants will not be asked to provide any other personal information.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a secured flash drive until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings. Transcriptions will be downloaded and stored on a secured flash drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address in the next paragraph. If you decide to withdraw during the phone interview, please verbally indicate your decision to withdraw, and the phone interview will be immediately terminated. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Perryman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jerry Leonard Newman, at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date



## Appendix E

### Choral Educators' Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools Telephone

#### Interview Script

Good morning/afternoon/evening!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this telephone interview regarding choral educators' perspectives on block scheduling in middle schools. Participation in this telephone interview is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, any information you provide will be removed from the study, and the recording of this interview will be immediately destroyed. Do you wish to proceed?

I will ask questions about your work as a middle school choral director.

19. How long have you worked as a middle school choral director?
20. Are your program(s) curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular?
21. (If the participant describes extra-curricular activities) What is the primary reason the performing ensemble is extra-curricular?
22. Do you feel you have support for the choral program from the administration?
23. Do you feel you have support from the district/central office staff?
24. How long has your school used the current form of class scheduling?
25. What format is currently used, and have there been alternate schedules in the past?
26. Did you work for the school prior to the transition to the current schedule?
27. Do you know what the previous choral enrollment numbers were for your school?
28. Has there been a change in enrollment after the implementation of the current schedule?
29. Did that change occur prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020?

30. In your perception, has the change, if any, increased or decreased attrition rates for the choral programs at your school?
31. If the change has increased attrition rates for the choral programs at your school, have you implemented recruiting strategies?
32. What recruiting strategies have you used that you consider most effective?
33. In your perception, has the change, if any, improved or damaged the choral programs at your school?
34. If you have a schedule that creates more extended class periods, do you feel the increased instructional time is an advantage or a disadvantage?
35. Has the change in the length of instructional time affected your teaching strategies and methods?
36. Are there any other thoughts you wish to contribute to this study on the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

Thank you so much for your time and assistance with this research study. If you would like a copy of the transcript of this interview, please contact me at [REDACTED], and I will send a copy. Do you have any questions for me? Again, thank you for your time and your service as an educator. I hope the remainder of your academic year goes well. Take care!

**Appendix F**  
**Interview Transcripts**

**Participant A Transcript**

Record. Hello.

Researcher: I think it's recording. Okay, so I have a script to read to you.

Participant A: Okay.

Researcher: And just answer questions ever how you feel. It should go pretty quickly.

Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this telephone interview regarding choral educators' perspectives on block scheduling in middle schools. Participation in this telephone interview is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, any information you provide will be removed from the study and the recording of this interview will be immediately destroyed. Do you wish to proceed?

Participant A: Yes.

Researcher: I will ask questions about your work as a middle school choral director. So only middle school.

PA: Okay.

Researcher: How long have you worked as a middle school choral director?

PA: Uh, thirteen years.

Researcher: Okay. Are your programs considered curricular, co-curricular, or extra-curricular?

So, is it just during the day, is it a combination of during the day, after school, or is it only after school? For choir.

PA: Uh...for choir? Um, I guess extra-curricular.

Researcher: Okay. What is the primary reason that your performing ensemble is extra-curricular, after school?

PA: Because my reason for that being an extra-curricular is because I am able to have students come in when their schedules are not in conflict with other classes.

Researcher: Do you feel you have support for the choral program from your administration?

PA: Um. Yes.

Researcher: Okay. Do you feel you have support from the district and from central office staff?

PA: Uh, no. I won't have to explain, am I? Ha! I don't feel like they're involved.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you. Alright. How long has your school used the current form of class scheduling? You guys are on a block schedule now, aren't you?

PA: Yes. So, umm, one year.

Researcher: Have there been alternate schedules in the past?

PA: Yes. I don't know what you would call that schedule.

Researcher: I think it would probably be a traditional schedule?

PA: Well, I just found out that exploratories...one of the exploratories were split between the grades. So, interim teachers would have all grades.

Researcher: I see. And did you work for the school prior to the transition to the current schedule?

PA: Yes.

Researcher: Alright. Do you know what the previous choral enrollment numbers were for your school? How many did you have in choir? Prior to the change.

PA: Umm, it varied. Somewhat. It depended on student interest.

Researcher: Okay. Has there been a change in enrollment after the implementation of the block schedule?

PA: Umm...Yes, but I'm also looking at other factors such as the way COVID affected it.

Researcher: Okay. So, the next question was, did that change occur prior to the COVID pandemic of 2020? So, that would be no, right?

PA: Right.

Researcher: You've only been in it for a year.

PA: Right.

Researcher: In your perception, has the change, if any, increased or decreased attrition rates for the choral program at your school? So, has it had any effect on your, your choral program?

PA: I don't believe so. Not with it being extra-curricular.

Researcher: If the change has increased attrition rates, have you implemented recruiting strategies? So, you said there wasn't really any change.

PA: No.

Researcher: Umm, what recruiting strategies have you used that you consider most effective?

PA: Umm, face-to-face communication? Umm, enrollment, like, how would you call that? Face-to-face recruitment.

Researcher: In your perception, has the change to block schedule, if any, improved or damaged your choral program?

PA: I don't believe it has affected it really. Yeah, it is harder for me because we've only had it for one year.

Researcher: Mmm-hmmm. If you had a schedule that created more extended class periods, do you feel increased instructional time is an advantage or a disadvantage?

PA: Will you please repeat that?

Researcher: Sure! If you have a schedule that creates more extended class periods, do you feel the increased instructional time is an advantage or a disadvantage?

PA: I would say neither because I'm extra-curricular.

Researcher: What about your general music classes, did they change in length when you changed to block schedule or are they 45 minutes?

PA: They stayed the same.

Researcher: Okay. Has the change and...then this really hasn't affected you, but has the change in the length of instructional time affected your teaching strategies and methods? And you said there wasn't any change.

PA: No.

Researcher: Are there any thoughts you wish to contribute to this study on the perceived effects of block scheduling on middle school choral programs?

PA: I would say that for many teachers who teach choir, um, curricularly? Umm, I'm not sure if that's correct. That it would hurt their programs because they're missing a grade. One of the grades.

Researcher: Do you think that would be...you're talking about the...in your district and that you're shared between schools. So, you said that that would be...that would be a detriment because of the scheduling change. Is that what you're saying?

PA: Yes, yes, because we're, we're not here to see the other grades. So, we're going to miss one of the sixth through eighth grades.

Researcher: Do you think that would cause a problem? You said... it would...

PA: Yes. It would hurt the program overall. And it would hurt not only the middle school but the high school program.

Researcher: Okay. All right, well that was all I had. Thank you so much for your time and assistance with this research study.

PA: Okay.

Researcher: If you would like a copy of the transcript of this interview, just let me know and I will send a copy. Do you have any questions for me?

PA: I did, was it okay to just message you the scan of the consent paper?

Researcher: Yes.

PA: Okay, thank you. If you need it a different way, just let me know. Okay, I texted it to you.

Researcher: All right, I appreciate that. Thank you for your time and your service as an educator and I hope that you have a great, great rest of your academic year and good luck with concerts coming up! Thank you so much for helping me out with this. I really appreciate it!

PA: Thanks, you too! And you're welcome!

**Participant B Transcript**

Record. Hello.

Researcher: I have a little script that I need to read to you. Good afternoon, thank you for agreeing to participate in this telephone interview regarding choral educators' perspectives on block scheduling in middle schools. Participation in this telephone interview is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, any information you provide will be removed from the study and the recording of this interview will be immediately destroyed. Do you wish to proceed?

Participant B: Yes.

Researcher: All right. I will be asking questions about your work as a middle school choral director. So, no high school, just middle school.

Participant B: Okay.

Researcher: How long have you worked as a middle school choral director?

PB: Since 2003, so 20 years.

Researcher: And are your programs curricular, co-curricular, or extracurricular? So, are they only during the school day? Do you have a combination of during school and after school programs or is your choral program only after school?

PB: Umm, initially, it was only after school and then it was co-curricular and then it was curricular and, and chorally now it's non-existent. Well, I take that back. My eighth grade would be, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm not speaking. My eighth grade, umm, would, will be umm, curricular.

Researcher: Okay.

PB: This year, assuming they sync.



Researcher: You said that at least one point they were extracurricular. What was the primary reason for the performing ensemble being umm, extracurricular?

PB: Because they would not schedule chorus during the school day, umm, because they needed me to teach a larger number of students and, umm, more rotations with other exploratories. And the numbers weren't at that moment, the numbers weren't large enough for me to just teach in the, just teach chorus course during the school day.

Researcher: I understand. Do you feel that you have support for the choral program from your administration?

PB: I have verbal support. I don't actually have scheduling support.

Researcher: Excellent, thank you for that clarification. Do you feel you have support from the district and central office staff?

PB: I have not been active with the district, but are you talking about like our county, or are you talking about the overall district.

Researcher: Your county.

PB: Okay. Our county. With our county, again, I think that there's a dream out there for all of our programs to have in the county to have middle school choral programs, but there's not been anybody to mandate that scheduling or, you know, to even encourage our building administration to block that time and to protect that, that, umm, opportunity for our students. We don't get the same support that I feel like other programs, for instance, band, gets. Band's time is protected, and, umm, by the scheduling, but I don't feel like my time has ever been protected by the scheduling.

Researcher: Thank you for making that observation about the band. I appreciate that.

PB: Mmm-hmm. You're welcome.

Researcher: How long has your school used the current form of class scheduling you have now?  
You switched to block, right?

PB: Yeah, we switched to block. I'm trying to remember when we switched to block. Umm...I want to say that it's been about 10 years, maybe a little less, maybe I'm just trying to remember because I've also moved locations several times, so I'm trying to connect it to that, and I have had several administrators through that time. I'm at least on my third administrator since block scheduling, was instituted with the middle school program.

Researcher: Okay. So, you would say at least five years?

PB: Yes, absolutely.

Researcher: And, umm. This is block scheduling, have there been alternate schedules in the past?

PB: Yes. And initially, when I started with this middle school, I was on an AB weeks and I alternated every week, but I kept the same students. I'm pretty sure I kept them for the entire year, which allowed me to develop greater rapport with the students, and you know, so then I was teaching in small clusters, and then putting them together for large, large events.

Researcher: That's neat! Did you work for the school prior to this transition to the current schedule?

PB: At the high school. At the high school level, I've always worked there, and that's been block scheduling. My entire teaching career. \*Intercom interrupts. \*

\*Afternoon announcements on intercom\*

Researcher: We have that same issue here. (Addressing the intercom interruption.) They use the intercom a lot!

PB: Yes. It's the end of the day. It's, I'm glad I'm not teaching at the end of the day. Ha ha.

Researcher: Yes. Ha ha. I would go insane.

PB: Yes. I would, too. There's no way. 'Cause, yeah...anyway.

Researcher: Do you know what your previous choral enrollment numbers were for your school?

PB: Before I arrived?

Researcher: Hmm. Let's see... prior to the change to the block schedule?

PB: So, prior to five years ago.

Researcher: Mmm-hmm.

PB: Umm, when I was teaching chorus here, I had a 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade chorus. My numbers were, I had like 20-some 6th graders. Umm, one time, I had 30 7th graders, and I don't know, maybe 20, 25 8th graders? So. I still didn't have them for the whole year. You know, when I was teaching chorus, I just had them one semester. And then it would be a different group the next semester.

Researcher: I see. Has there been a change in your enrollment since the implementation of the block schedule?

PB: Yes. That has changed, but also, chorus, has changed. It's no longer-except for 8th graders-it's no longer during the day. So, my numbers range from 15-24 students in class, but now it's, 6th and 7th grade is general music or music appreciation, music exploratory.

Researcher: Did that enrollment change occur prior to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020?

PB: Well, I had chorus prior to the pandemic. So, so yes, I mean, it happened. It, it happened on return.

Researcher: I see. Yeah, we've had a lot of changes, haven't we?

PB: Oh, my goodness! So, and then, well. Yeah. Yes. Ha!

Researcher: Ha! In your perception, has the change, if any, increased or decreased attrition rates for your kids? \*Intercom interrupts again. \*

PB: Okay. Has it increased or decreased what?

Researcher: Attrition rates.

PB: Sorry, between the announcements, so.

Researcher: Has it increased the lack of students or decreased the lack of students in your class?

PB: Oh, okay.

Researcher: Leaving the class.

PB: No, no. I don't think there's really been a change in that because I'm not teaching chorus, except for 8th graders. And my 8th graders last year were very much into singing with me. So, I don't know what will happen this year with 8th graders. Because that's the other thing. I don't think these students know they're supposed to be in chorus. I think they're just thinking their music. That's it.

Researcher: I see. If the change has increased rates, have you implemented recruiting strategies? Do you have recruitment strategies?

PB: Mainly word of mouth and talking with individual students. You know, I, I seek out students that I know that enjoy singing and would like to be a part of a performing arts group. So, it's, that's the recruiting strategy. I mean, sometimes it's literally going to like the cafeteria where they're all in there at lunch and saying, hey, who would like to sign up for chorus? And that's also the way that I got students to stay after school back in the day when I was trying to prove the worth of having an in-school program. I would go and...and talk to them in large groups when they had, you know, class meetings, or lunch.

Researcher: Okay. Do you consider any other recruiting strategies effective?

PB: Oh, I'm sure that there are. But that's not. I'm not. Those are the ones I've used. So, I think they have been effective. So, um.

Researcher: Thank you. In your perception has the change to block schedule improved or damaged the choral program at your school?

PB: I think it damages it. You do not, you don't have the opportunity to, at least the way the scheduling is here. Don't have the opportunity to, to maintain the same students throughout the course of a year. So, that doesn't help you to develop a relationship or to develop the student's skillset. And then it's easier for them to lose interest. \*Intercom interrupts. \*

Researcher: We're almost there. If you have a schedule that creates more extended class periods, do you feel the increased instructional time would be an advantage or a disadvantage?

PB: Well, if I were teaching chorus, I think having, you know, because I have basically a forty-five-minute block with these students. And if I were teaching chorus with middle schoolers, to have an hour might would be beneficial or helpful, but to have them in class for forty-five minutes would, would be great. If I had them every day all year long, that would be phenomenal. But, you know, because the middle school voice is also less mature. So, really being able to sing much more than that is, probably not in the best interest of the student.

Researcher: Certainly. Has the change in length of instructional time affected your teaching strategies and methods?

PB: It's affected what I teach. It's not affected in the methods per se, but I mean, my time frame, my time frames didn't change. The block scheduling affected the time frame for the core classes. So, it did not change how long I have students in class. My time frame is the same at the middle school. As it was prior to block scheduling, I just...I switched student groups more frequently, so.

Researcher: Thank you very much for including that.

PB: Mmm-hmm, you're welcome.

Researcher: Are there any other thoughts you wish to contribute to this...this study on the perceived effects of block scheduling or middle school choral programs?

PB: Well, personally, I think block scheduling is a disservice to our students in general, regardless of the choral prog, irregardless of the choral program, or band program, or...or any other specific umm, extra-cur...extra activity, I don't think it's beneficial for our students as a parent or as a teacher, our students and their core subject matter. Kids only get, it's like one semester of science, or one semester of history. They don't get it all year long. And I don't think, for the most part, I don't think the average teacher is capable of teaching like a 90-minute block and be effective with it. I think the kids are, it's the same teaching methods as before, and the kids are given extra time to complete their homework at school. So, that's been my experience. Both as a parent, as a grandparent now, and as a co-worker. Ha! So...I...I have opposed block scheduling, even at the high school level, for as long as I can remember. So.

Researcher: And you are not alone in that perception. There are a few folks, according to the research I've done, that agree with you on that particular point.

PB: I think it's a disservice to our students, bottom line, and if we're supposed to be about helping and educating our students, why do we continue to give them a disservice? I mean, I don't know the answer. And I know this is all recorded, too, but the answer is that it's financially feasible. It's better for our school systems. They can hire less teachers. And they can get the job done per se, quote/unquote job done, with less, less personnel. And that means financial savings for them. And I don't think it's the best...best plan for our kids.

Researcher: Well, thank you so much for your time and assistance with this research study. If you'd like a copy of this transcript, umm, of this interview, please contact me and I will send you a copy.

PB: Alright.

Researcher: Do you have any questions for me?

PB: I do not. Thank you.

Researcher: Thank you very much! Again, I thank you for your time. Thank you for your time and your service as an educator. I hope that your fall programming and winter concerts go well!

PB: Me, too. Thanks! Good luck with your research!

## Appendix G

### Interview Consent

**Title of the Project:** Choral Educators' Perspectives on Block Scheduling in Middle Schools  
**Principal Investigator:** Heather Perryman, Doctoral Candidate, School of Music, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and currently work as a licensed educator in middle school choral education. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The study aims to explore teacher perceptions of the effects of block scheduling, observe perceived challenges and advantages associated with block scheduling, and assist with developing advocacy strategies and materials.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be included in the second part of this study, I will ask you to do the following:

Participate in a telephone interview with the researcher, Heather Perryman. The telephone interview will consist of ten questions designed to observe your experiences with block scheduling as a middle school choral educator. The completion of the phone interview should take thirty minutes or less. This interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes only.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include developing advocacy materials and adding to the existing literature about block scheduling and the performing arts.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Participants will not be asked to provide any other personal information.

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 Approved on 5-11-2023



- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and then transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a secured flash drive until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings. Transcriptions will be downloaded and stored on a secured flash drive. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address in the next paragraph. If you decide to withdraw during the phone interview, please verbally indicate your decision to withdraw, and the phone interview will be immediately terminated. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Perryman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at

██████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jerry Leonard Newman, at ██████████

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

#### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

Liberty University  
IRB-FY22-23-1162  
Approved on 5-11-2023

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date

Liberty University  
IRB-FY22-23-1162  
Approved on 5-11-2023

## Appendix H

**FOR SCHOOLS CONSIDERING BLOCK SCHEDULING**

**STEPS TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL CHORAL PROGRAMS**

Block scheduling can be an asset to choral performance programs if correctly implemented! The following strategies can aid in building and protecting choral music education.

**ASK QUESTIONS**

- Ask to be part of the implementation process. Find out what the division is considering and highlight potential issues for music programs.
- Assess potential schedules adopted by other schools and include all stakeholders in decisions.

**COMMUNICATE**

- Speak with the school administration and address your concerns.
- Talk to guidance counselors and build a good relationship with them. They can help with enrollment issues.

**DISCOVER WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING**

- Consult with colleagues in surrounding districts to learn from their experiences.
- Ask for professional development leave and go observe a choral program using block scheduling.

**FORM AN ARTS TASK FORCE**

An arts task force can support all arts programs in the division and provide information to administrators that may aid in schedule implementation.

**TRAINING IS IMPORTANT**

Teaching with a block schedule can be different than with a traditional schedule. If the division is not providing training, seek out professional development. Changing teaching strategies will minimize teacher burnout and increase student engagement.

**KEEP ALL DECISIONS STUDENT-CENTERED**

- Students, parents, teachers, administration, and all stakeholders should have a voice.
- Everyone needs to work together to ensure student achievement and equal access to a quality education.





## FOR CHORAL PROGRAMS EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES FROM BLOCK SCHEDULING: STEPS TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL CHORAL PROGRAMS

Block scheduling can be an asset to choral performance programs if correctly implemented! The following strategies can aid in building and protecting choral music education.

### RESEARCH

Resources that can help with strategic arts plans and provide strategies for improving student engagement and enrollment:

- Benham, John L. *Music Advocacy: Moving from Survival to Vision*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011.
- Canady, Robert Lynn and Michael D. Rettig. *Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Merenbloom, Elliot Y., and Barbara A. Kalina. *Making Creative Schedules Work in Middle and High Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2007.

### COMMUNICATE

- Speak with the school administration and address your concerns.
- Talk to guidance counselors and build a good relationship with them. They can help with enrollment issues.

### DISCOVER WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

- Consult with colleagues in surrounding districts to learn from their experiences.
- Ask for professional development leave and go observe a choral program using block scheduling. Report findings to administration.

### FORM AN ARTS TASK FORCE

An arts task force can support all arts programs in the division and provide information to administrators that may aid in schedule implementation. The task force can also develop a strategic arts plan to address issues.

### TRAINING IS IMPORTANT

Teaching with a block schedule can be different than with a traditional schedule. If the division is not providing training, seek out professional development. Changing teaching strategies will minimize teacher burnout and increase student engagement.

### KEEP ALL DECISIONS STUDENT-CENTERED

- Students, parents, teachers, administration, and all stakeholders should have a voice.
- Everyone needs to work together to ensure student achievement and equal access to a quality education.

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