



## Research Brief

### Trimester Schedule

**Question:** What is a trimester schedule? What are the advantages and disadvantages of trimester schedules? What are some of the implementation considerations?

**Summary of Findings:** Recently many high schools have looked at ways to maintain longer instructional blocks and also provide more course options for students. One response was creation of a trimester schedule, a schedule that divides the school year into three semesters rather than two. Adoption of a trimester model is most often driven by three issues: the desire to provide long blocks of instructional time, interest in improving school climate by reducing the number of classes any student or teacher has on a given day, and a desire to improve instructional quality.

Adoption of a trimester system is supported by several of the recommendations in *Breaking Ranks*: that curriculum offer essential knowledge that makes connections to real life; that instructional strategies actively engage students in their learning; that caring relationships between students and adults characterize the school; and that the use of time and organization be utilized to best meet the student needs.

#### Example of a Trimester Schedule:

<i>Hr.</i>	<i>Fall</i>	<i>Winter</i>	<i>Spring</i>
1	English 9A	Art	US History B
2	Band A	Band B	Band C
3	Algebra 1A	Algebra 1B	English 9B
4	Phys Ed.	Spanish 1A	Spanish 1B
5	Biology A	US History A	Biology B

A trimester schedule consists of three 12-week trimesters. A student generally takes 5 classes each trimester. Such a schedule is commonly referred to as a 3X5 schedule. Most schools schedule two official grading periods each trimester, at 6 and 12 weeks. Teachers most often teach 4 classes each trimester and instructional periods are often 70-75 minutes in length. Most yearlong courses in a traditional schedule meet for two trimesters. Because each individual class period is longer, the number of instructional minutes remains the same. Some classes might meet all three trimesters.

#### Advantages and Disadvantages

As with any scheduling model there are both advantages and disadvantages. Some of the recognized advantages are:

1. Students may take more courses in a year than in other scheduling models.
2. Students can take a greater variety of classes than they might have ordinarily taken.
3. There are fewer courses per term for both students and teachers.
4. Students are able to devote more time to each individual subject allowing for more in-depth study and higher quality work.
5. Students may be more willing to take a challenging 12-week course than they are in a semester schedule.
6. If a student fails a class, it is possible to provide credit recovery options more quickly thus reducing the likelihood of not graduating on time.
7. Because students may take more courses it provides an opportunity to increase graduation requirements.
8. Students change class less often, which makes for fewer potential disruptions and discipline problems that often arise when students move around the school.
9. Teachers may have fewer preparations each trimester.



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10. Teachers may have fewer additional assigned duties.
11. With longer class periods, teachers gain additional planning time.
12. Provides an opportunity to create new courses.
13. Longer class periods provide an opportunity for use of a greater variety of instructional strategies.
14. Generally the first trimester ends prior to winter break assuring that no finals will be given following a major break.

There are also identified disadvantages. Among them are:

1. The challenge of changing from the current system. Resistance to change
2. Addressing teacher concern about the retention of knowledge when a student may not have a course in a content area for more than one trimester.
3. Teachers may have more preparations each academic year.
4. Teaching strategies may not change to fit the longer instructional period.
5. There may be challenges in deciding which courses are offered which trimester.

### Implementation Issues

Principals have identified a number of implementation issues.

1. It is important to involve teachers and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation of a trimester schedule. Because a trimester schedule is quite different than a traditional schedule it is important to work collaboratively to make decisions about the specific scheduling of courses.
2. All courses may not be the same length. Some courses may need to meet for more than one trimester. Decisions about which courses meet for two or three trimesters need to be made collaboratively and with explicit rationale. Most often performing music and advanced placement classes meet for more than one trimester.
3. Important decisions need to be made about whether a student can take a course in a content area all three trimesters. For example, might a student take Spanish 1 for two trimesters and then begin Spanish 2 the third? Or might a student take three trimesters of art courses?
4. School counselors need to be very involved in planning a trimester schedule and work closely with students and their families to develop a four-year Program of Study that assures successful completion of all graduation requirements.
5. Consideration must also be given to how students who move into the school from a school on a traditional schedule transition into the trimester model.
6. Finally, schools should not rush into making the change. They should utilize a comprehensive planning approach and implement a public relations initiative that assures that every student and their family is familiar with the change and its impact on the student's program.

### Online Resources:

#### Comprehensive Trimester Schedule Resource

This is a comprehensive site providing description of the trimester scheduling model. It includes a set of frequently asked questions, summary of research, sample trimester schedule and links to 27 schools using a trimester schedule.

[www.trimester.org](http://www.trimester.org)



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### **Video on Trimester Schedule**

Looking at the Trimester Schedule, with Kent DeKoninick, an Indiana Information Network video.  
[http://www.doe.state.in.us/media/video/ipla/DVS\\_a\\_03.html](http://www.doe.state.in.us/media/video/ipla/DVS_a_03.html)

### **Indiana High School Trimester Schedule**

This site describes Ozaukee High School's Trimester Scheduling Plan and includes a sample schedule and a discussion of the schedule's advantages.

[http://ohs.nosd.edu/display\\_page.asp?PID=220](http://ohs.nosd.edu/display_page.asp?PID=220)

### **Trimester Schedule at Madison High School in South Dakota**

This article provides an overview of a 72 minute 5 period schedule implemented at a South Dakota high school.

[http://www.madison.k12.sd.us/superintendent/trimester\\_schedule\\_at\\_madison\\_hi.htm](http://www.madison.k12.sd.us/superintendent/trimester_schedule_at_madison_hi.htm)

### **ERIC Research Report on Benefits of Various Scheduling Models**

This link provides access to a report describing the benefits of different scheduling models.

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED457590&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED457590](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED457590&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED457590)

### **Example of Trimester Schedule and State Graduation Requirements**

This report provides an example of a detailed trimester schedule for 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade aligned with one state's graduation requirements. It can serve as a model for your own school.

[www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/faq10\\_178602\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/faq10_178602_7.pdf)

### **Trimester Schedule at a New High School**

This site provides lots of information about the new trimester schedule being implemented at Skyline High School in the fall of 2008.

[http://www.aaps.k12.mi.us/skyline.home/trimester\\_scheduling](http://www.aaps.k12.mi.us/skyline.home/trimester_scheduling)

### **Trimester Schedule at Southridge High School in Beaverton, OR**

These two links provide information about the transformation of Southridge High School to a trimester schedule and other elements to make a big school seem small.

<http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003sept/southridge.html>

### **Southridge High School and the Trimester Schedule**

[http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/descriptions/southridge/pdfs/trimester\\_scheduling.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/descriptions/southridge/pdfs/trimester_scheduling.pdf)

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