

**Portland School Committee**

**Workshop – 7pm**

**Room 321, PATHS**

**Wednesday, December 9, 2009**

**Assuring that all students are learning for their future**

**7:00 pm - Workshop**

1. Status Report on the Common High School Schedule.

**Upcoming School Committee Meetings – Room 250, CBHS**

Dec. 16, 7pm Business Meeting

**Upcoming Workshops**

Dec. 16, 6pm Market Analysis, Room 250, CBHS

**Upcoming Subcommittee meetings**

TBD Finance Committee

# Portland Public Schools

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TO: Portland School Committee  
FROM: Dr. Morse, Superintendent  
DATE: December 9, 2009

Portland is “unique,” how often have we heard that phrase? In essence it is a true statement that seems to be applied to every issue or program being discussed. In this case, Portland is really unique. It is the only school system in Maine with four high schools: Portland High School, Deering High School, Casco Bay High School, and Portland Arts and Technology High School.

The school system adopted a site-based management model nearly 20 years ago which has evolved into a very independent set of schools. Over the years, due to site-based management, Portland’s high schools have largely acted independently of each other. A competitive spirit has grown over the years in which “equity” came to mean duplication of programs, increased costs, and little common programming. When resources are rich, this “works.” However, the best economic times are behind us.

The State of Maine is in financial crisis, and now is the time to, as the Chinese proverb states, “turn crisis into opportunity.” For the past three months, a representative sample of parents, teachers, and administrators have met expressly to work on building a common schedule framework (minutes attached). The number one priority is to maintain a rich and diverse course of studies so that Portland students have every opportunity to prepare for careers, college, and citizenship. The second priority is

to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. During our discussions we also added a number of other goals:

- Maintain a rich course of studies by increasing enrollment in previously under enrolled classes;
- Maintain low enrolled AP courses by combining classes or moving staff;
- Open PATHS to more Portland students;
- Create an opportunity for our multilingual students to remediate and accelerate their learning;
- Start high school students later in the day;
- Add a period at the beginning or end of the school day;
- Provide “choice” for our juniors and seniors related to their college career objectives;
- Allow each high school to maintain a unique culture;

Once presented to the School Committee as a draft framework in December, the principals and I will present the framework throughout the city in January. We will collect public comment, make final revisions and present the final framework to the School Committee on February 24<sup>th</sup>.

Master schedules are incredibly complex. The basic variations are:

1. The traditional 7 or 8 period day that meets every day for 45 minutes.
2. A block schedule that allows for larger blocks of time, usually 70-80 minutes, and meets on a semester basis (4x4) or alternating days for an entire year (A/B).
3. A blended schedule that takes advantage of each major model to maximize students’ learning opportunities.

The High School Common Schedule Task Force is recommending a blended schedule. Depending on the course and student interest, some courses will be year long, some semester based, and some

alternating. In addition, we're recommending two places in the schedule – one at the beginning and one at the end of the day - that allows for maximum flexibility, transition of students between schools, extended school day for struggling students, reduction in under-enrolled classes, late start and music program placement that provides additional opportunities for increasing enrollment, as well as other advantages.

This schedule provides some independence that allows the bulk of the day – between 8:15 a.m. and 1:25 p.m. – in the current draft to be designed to meet the needs of each building.

In order to provide for the flexibility necessary to coordinate the high school master schedule, we would switch the starting times of the middle school with the high school. The research on a later start for high schools is compelling.

This proposal framework addresses all the criteria discussed from the outset. It allows for maximizing the needs of the students and the system.

**High School Common Schedule Task Force**  
**November 18, 2009 - Minutes**

**Principals' Recommendation**

Mike, Ken and Derek met (with Jim attending for part of the time) this past Monday to draft a common schedule. The objectives are:

1. To be able to share more students and staff among the high schools
2. To be able to preserve a rich program of offerings for students in a difficult economic environment
3. To enable each high school to establish its own identity

The principals also reviewed the schedule elements that were identified at the last meeting as most important by the HSCSTF.

**Key Elements of the Common Schedule Recommendation (copy attached):**

Unified AM Block - 7:00 to 8:15 (Bus to Home School) for 25% of the kids (estimate)
Block 1 - 8:30 to 9:50
Block 2 - 9:55 to 11:15
Block 3 - 11:20 to 12:40
Lunch/Advisory/Announcements - 12:40 to 1:25 (Bus to Unified School)
Unified PM Block - 1:25-2:40 for 75% of the kids (estimate)

- Transitions from a four block day to a five block day
- Begins and ends the school day in a more unified way
- Begins the day with a unified block on an A/B schedule that offers more active classes that kids really enjoy AND will get up early to attend (for example, music.) Anticipate 25% of students will take advantage of the early block
- Expect most students will begin the school day with Block 1
- Blocks 1, 2 and 3 may look very different in each school
- Preliminary review with Kevin indicates that bus transportation will work
- Lunch time is consistent and offers a unified time for travel
- The PM unified block may be offered as an A/B or a 4 X 4 schedule
- Impact to elementary and high school start times (elementary start earlier and high school later)  
Elementary – 7:30 start time  
Middle – 8 start time  
High – 8:30 start time
- AM unified block is definitely an A/B schedule to offer as many options for students as possible
- Some teachers may teach 6 sections – a duty or study hall would not count as one of those 6 sections BUT a directed study or academic support block would be counted
- PM unified block may be more varied – with academic support, remediation, etc.
- Every teacher will get one period for prep – the rest of the time teachers will be working with kids

**Clarifying Questions**

Q: For the middle blocks, is it anything goes?

A: Yes, the only given is that each high school needs to offer lunch and ensure that the scheduling accommodates students who need to travel to another location.

Q: Will students who attend PATHS have to start their PATHS sessions ½ hour late?

A: That issue was not discussed. Principals will talk more it.

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Q: When will PATHS kids each lunch?

A: Not sure

Q: What do you envision students doing during blocks when they don't have a class?

A: The idea is to schedule students as fully as possible – more study halls would be an unintended consequence.

Q: If students decide to take five blocks, will it cost more? Students may request more classes which would mean more teachers and increased costs?

A: Not sure. Students may not be able to take all the classes they request (and that happens today and is managed on a case by case basis.)

Q: Why is lunch a problem at PHS?

A: It doesn't appear that there is sufficient prep time for two lunches (the current PHS lunch schedule) in the proposed schedule. It's an open question that Mike continues to explore.

Q: Who pays for early college courses?

A: State money is available.

Q: Principals talked about offering AP classes in the PM unified block – will more AP classes be offered during other blocks?

A: Yes.

Q: There are some issues with the Peaks boat schedule – 15 minutes later would help and not leave kids with nothing to do as they wait for school to begin.

A: The impact to Peaks students and other island students needs to be further examined.

Q: Can students get all the classes they need – especially if they choose not to take advantage of the unified blocks?

A: The AM unified block is focused on specialty classes, but the PM unified block will offer a variety of classes.

Q: Can PATHS offer classes in unified blocks?

A: Yes.

Q: At the unified lunch must students stay until 1:25 PM?

A: No – the block will allow for transportation as early as 12:40.

Q: It's a long stretch until lunch – will that work?

A: Yes, many kids graze all day long and most kids will come at 8:30.

Q: Is 45 minutes long enough for both lunch and advisory?

A: It's a bit of a misnomer – it's a unified period that includes at least lunch and transportation. Schools may also schedule other activities (advisory, crew, lunch clubs, etc.)

Q: Is the plan to run a complete transportation schedule once at 7 AM and again at 8:30 AM for the staggered start times AND also at 1:25 PM and 2:40 PM?

A: That is not clear yet – may be more inconvenient for kids to get to school (about 25% of kids take the bus.)

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- Q: What about sports?  
A: Practices could be scheduled during the AM unified block (though teachers who are also receiving stipends for coaching can not count that practice as a teaching block – no double dipping.) Games start typically around 3:30 (though away games may require early release.) No sports practices during the PM unified block.
- Q: What about the impact on other adult employees – secretaries, ed techs, custodians, etc.?  
A: The changes may require work schedule changes. That will happen through one on one conversations and conversations with union leaders as appropriate.
- Q: When is breakfast?  
A: Before Block 1 (8:30) – so we still have to figure out how to accommodate students who eat breakfast at school and want to take an AM unified block.
- Q: Can lunch be flexible?  
A: Yes, maybe even between Blocks 2 and 3 on a school by school basis.
- Q: Might teacher workloads be greater than 120 students?  
A: That is not the intent. The School Committee guideline is between 100 and 120 students. The goal is a class size range between 10 and 22 (rather than the 6 to 30 we see today.)
- Q: If students commute from one school to another for the PM unified block – would they still get an advisory?  
A: That depends on how each school chooses to schedule advisory.
- Q: Will a longer day be helpful for kids who need more support (not just ELL)?  
A: Yes, it opens up options for all youngsters.
- Q: If AP classes are scheduled for only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the year (AP classes will end with the AP test), students may engage in an internship, community service, etc. but where do the teachers go?  
A: Probably to supervise internships, provide support to students who need it, etc. AP teachers like to have classes every day but find students disengage after the AP test.

**Probing Questions**

- Q: What about credits? Do we want 16 year olds graduating from high school?  
A: As we move toward standards based graduation requirements, it gives students more opportunities for either additional high school classes or to graduate early. We can also keep students under the high school umbrella by offering a couple of classes at the high school for them and allow them to take a couple of college classes. Students will experience college while still having the support they need to be successful. It creates a bridge to success for many students.
- Comment: This may also help us consider senior year very differently – common schedules are only the beginning – we need to keep focused on making changes that positively impact student success.
- Q: How will this save money?  
A: First, we definitely have AP classes with low enrollments and combining these classes will save money. This new schedule may not save a ton of money, but will save current programs for students. Our purpose is to maintain quality programming. It will NOT cost more money.

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Q: What is your attitude toward the students who want to go for the whole day? Given financial constraints how can we accommodate all students?

A: Just as today, we may not be able to accommodate all student requests.

Q: What will you do if more than 25% of students want to take the AM unified block?

A: That may cost more but it may also create a compelling argument for funding. Not likely to happen.

Q: Would this look different if we were not looking to increase the number of students who take music?

A: Not really. 25% is just a guess. If fewer kids sign up, then as we always do, we'll have to staff down.

Q: What if 7 AM looks doable to a lot of students when they sign up for classes, but students drop the class, what happens to the staff person?

A: We staff with teacher contracts so we would not lay off during the year (same policy as today.) But low enrollment may impact future staffing.

Q: And who among staff gets the 7 AM classes – is it drawing straws?

A: Any such change requires a meet and consult with teachers – it's a one on one conversation.

Q: Do we have any data that tells us how many students would get up in time for a 7 AM class?

A: Not much data analysis yet. We can talk with other schools with similar schedules about their experience. Kids who love something will get up!

Q: How come only three high schools were involved in the recommendation? It is difficult for PATHS – harder to accommodate students.

A: Still work to do – and the goal is to increase opportunities for students to attend PATHS.

**Warm/Cool Feedback**

- Only a concept – should PATHS offer a third session?
- I like that it opens up more opportunity for students who could do three classes before going to PATHS.
- I like that we've thought outside the box – it's flexible.
- My concern is to move times slightly – move 7 AM to later – for some kids that is very early. Make the AM unified block 7:15 to 8:15 and start Block 1 at 8:15. Works better for Peaks students.
- Music in the AM unified block and AP in the PM unified block will work better than what we do now.
- More open to students who might not go to PATHS otherwise.
- Concerns with bussing for the AM unified block – some busses will come very early. Such an early start for walkers means some kids may be walking to school in the dark.
- Lots of multiple entry points – this schedule opens up opportunity for many students.
- Really excited that the individual integrity of each school is honored.
- Will sticking to that integrity make each high school schedule very hectic?
- 7 AM is really early! Could we make it later with a longer school day?
- Need to balance adult and student needs.
- How could Adult Ed piggyback on this schedule?
- Appreciate the idea for a PATHS third session – PATHS will make it work.
- What about the impact on elementary school parents, students and staff? They haven't been part of the conversation.

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**Dr. Morse's Comments**

- Saw a lot of energy among principals to meet student needs
- May support more students going to PATHS
- Provides more students access to early college classes.
- Provides student access to more time to meet standards
- Music participation is low – this may increase those numbers
- Each school can use the three middle blocks to establish their own identities

**Next Steps**

1. Distribute notes – Sue – 11/20/09
2. Share progress, notes, etc. with staffs – principals will do so in what ever way makes sense for their schools.
3. Revise the recommendation given today's feedback – principals by 12/3/09 (next meeting)
4. Develop a communication plan for other stakeholders impacted by these changes (for example, high school students, elementary staff and both elementary and high school parents.) – Jim to consider.

**Parking Lot**

- Long time without lunch
- Lunch staff – will they work longer?
- When do PATHS students in session II eat lunch?