



JCAFT ACTION

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THE VOICE OF A CLASSROOM TEACHER ON The Change to Alternating Block Scheduling

By Jonathan Dick – English Teacher, Pinson Valley High School

The illusion of choice is far more insulting than the absence thereof. Teachers across Jefferson County were asked last year what their thoughts on the proposed alternating block schedule were. The answer was a resounding question mark where teachers, both veteran and new, were concerned not only with their caseloads but with the overall effect on the students. Many teachers saw and still see the alternating block schedule as a pointless excuse for change. There's nothing inherently wrong with change, but where many educators fail is in seeing that the true

value of change lies in the process rather than in the result itself. The alternating block schedule was implemented, despite what we may have heard, without regard for the classroom teacher or, more importantly, the students. In no other way is this more evident than in the earliest grade results from this school year. The county has pushed the panic button and enacted the grade recovery plan, with one school reporting that 60% of their student body has at least one failing grade. This is to say that once again teachers who had no say in the implementation of a drastic change in their school environment must now manipulate their grades in such a way that will not reflect the effects of the change on the overall student body.

The problem that so many teachers, students, and parents have with the alternating block schedule is that its implementation has completely disregarded the academic careers of the students as well as the workload for teachers. The word transition has aptly escaped certain members of administration in Jefferson County so much so that students and teachers must now bear the brunt of their oversight. The alternating block schedule might work in a transitional environment where the schedule is gradually introduced to incoming students and then incorporated year after year. This would allow those students who are used to the original block scheduling to finish their high school careers in a comfortable position. Any new students would only know the alternating block schedule. Once again, the idea is that transition takes time. "Results now" is a dangerous mode of thinking that promotes shoddy workmanship and skewed results. The concept of change will continue to be nothing short of a myth for the Jefferson County School System until the board can seriously take to heart the voices of its teachers and know that the battle for our students' minds is being lost to carelessness and lack of unity among those who are called to education.

JCAFT LEADERS ADDRESS MEMBER CONCERNS WITH ALTERNATING BLOCK SCHEDULING AND GRADING OF PRE-AP AND AP COURSE STUDENTS



JCAFT members will meet with Dr. Joan Buckley, Interim Deputy Superintendent for Instruction and Student Services on Wednesday, November 12 to discuss concerns and offer suggestions to school leaders in JefCoEd regarding the change to Alternating Block Scheduling. At the beginning of the 2008 school year

the schedule changed from traditional Block Scheduling practiced since 1995 in JefCoEd schools. Teachers are worried about many aspects of the changes. The present alternating schedule creates difficulty with consistency in the acquisition of skills, homework and grades. Scheduling has been a nightmare for administrators and counselors. Some schools have doubled in number of students failing subjects as compared to last year. Students who fail a course will not be able to take the course again the second semester, which means that failure of one course could mean that seniors will not be able to graduate with peers, since summer school may become a necessity. At least two high schools have reported that students are dropping out of school since they will not graduate with classmates with the traditional ceremony.

In an attempt to help, school officials met with school administrators Friday. It was reported to the JCAFT that many school administrators were as upset about the serious problems with schedules and the grading of students as the teachers. Apparently, principals and teachers are receiving many calls from upset parents about the schedule changes and the lower student grades. One teacher reported to the JCAFT that it is impossible to pass advanced math courses when students do not attend class daily. With the new schedule a student could be absent one day or attend a pep rally during one class and miss an entire week of classes, since the classes meet bi-weekly with alternating classes on Wednesdays. JCAFT leaders have been told that administrators are telling teachers to give failing students recovery work to pull up their grades. This is a last ditch attempt to repair a system that is broken and needs drastic and immediate changes. JCAFT members met in September to hear member concerns. Copies of the latest research on the effects of Block Scheduling were disseminated to participants. It was decided that the changes needed more time to implement and that future problems will be taken directly to school officials. Another meeting is planned for Nov. 18 at 5:00 pm at the JCAFT office where an official position will be taken regarding the changes JCAFT members believe are necessary for students to succeed. "JCAFT members may decide to ask the superintendent to make drastic changes as early as the second semester," according to JCAFT president, Vi Parramore. Teachers continue to express frustration with the grading problems and the acquisition of skills when they sometimes do not have the students for more than once or twice per week. Other teachers express concern with the large number of students in core academic courses that are not AP or Pre-AP courses. Apparently, in some schools local administrators have put extra teacher units into advanced courses instead of regular core courses.

JCAFT leaders will make suggestions to Dr. Buckley and report back information from Dr. Buckley to the members at the Nov. 18 meeting. These leaders are interested in working with their local administrators who appear to be as frustrated as the parents and the teachers. Please attend the Nov.18 meeting or call the

JCAFT office at 933-1124 if you have concerns or suggestions regarding Alternating Block scheduling and the recovery grading system. JCAFT leaders are committed to working with school leaders to make necessary changes.

PROGRAMS FOR AFT MEMBERS

Credit Counseling is 877/833-1745 and the Web address is www.unionplus.org/creditcounseling (or <http://www.unionplus.org/credit-counseling.cfm>) Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help union members with confidential financial guidance, free consumer credit counseling services and discounted debt management assistance. Members who call can get a written action plan that summarizes their financial situation and provides a budget and timeline for reaching the member's desired financial goals.

Save My Home Hotline: 866/490-5361 - Dedicated HUD certified counselors can help members negotiate with their banks/mortgage companies to work out an arrangement forestalling foreclosure.



PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING CANNED/NON-PERISHABLE FOODS TO THE JCAFT MEETING NOVEMBER 18 AT 5:00 P. M.

URGENT MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

Our office has been notified that the post office will not continue to forward mail after 95 days. Therefore we need your help in order to maintain our line of communications. Please make any change-of-address on the form below. You may mail or call 933-1124 or fax to 933-1101 or email at jcaft2143@aol.com with updates.

Change of Address

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

E-Mail _____

HOLIDAY/CHRISTMAS PARTY
THURSDAY, DEC. 11, 2008 - 4:30-6:30
JCAFT Auditorium

For Reservations, please call 933-1124; fax to 933-1101, or email jcaft2143@aol.com

NAME _____ Phone _____

WORKSITE _____ NO. GUESTS _____

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