Record: 1

Title: New Kids on the Block Schedule: Beginning Teachers Face Challenges.

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Document Type: Article

Subject Terms: *BEGINNING teachers
               *HIGH school teachers
               *BLOCK scheduling (Education)

Abstract: Explores the challenges faced by first-year teachers on teaching high school students who adopted block schedules. Debate on block scheduling; Implementation of instructional activities in a block schedule; Assessment of student progress in a block schedule.

Full Text Word Count: 6650

ISSN: 0018-1498

Accession Number: 4390121

Database: Academic Search Premier

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK SCHEDULE: BEGINNING TEACHERS FACE CHALLENGES

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Across the United States, an ever-increasing number of high schools have reevaluated their use of instructional time and have adopted some form of a block schedule. Block scheduling, an innovation grounded in Trump's (1959) Flexible Modular Scheduling Design, reorganizes the school day into extended blocks of time, each approximately 70 to 90 minutes. According to proponents of the block schedule, the reorganization of instructional time into longer, more flexible "blocks" offers possibilities to extend classroom experiences (Marshak, 1999), to reduce discipline problems (Hampton, 1997), to increase student attendance (Khazzaka, 1998) and to decrease failure rates (Hottenstein & Maletesta, 1993). Cawelti (1994) believes that block scheduling increases teacher planning time, decreases teacher load by reducing the number of students and preparations per teacher, and encourages teachers to vary teaching strategies.

Literature on the problems of beginning teachers falls into one of two categories: those that deal with problems specific to novice teachers and strategies offered to alleviate those difficulties. To date, no study specifically examining problems of beginning teachers related to teaching within a block schedule could be found in the literature. The purpose of this study was to determine the problems first-year teachers experienced in the block as they negotiated the beginnings of their careers.

First-year Teachers
Studies designed to identify problems and issues facing beginning teachers have been conducted for more than half a century. The findings of these studies indicate that the issues and problems faced by first-year teachers are perennial. Brock and Grady (1997) concluded, "Teaching is one of the few careers in which the least experienced members face the greatest challenges and most responsibilities (p. 11).

Equipped with "book" knowledge of subject matter, a few practiced teaching strategies, and limited planning skills, novice teachers experience an odyssey of emotions which run the gamut---exhilaration, frustration, uncertainty, confusion, and isolation. Veenman (1984) referred to this phenomenon as reality shock, and "In general this concept is used to indicate the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teaching training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life" (p. 143). According to Ganser (1997), "Being a beginning teacher is like being in water over your head. You are floating on a tiny piece of foam that crumbles away every day just a little bit" (p. 106).

The problems faced by first-year teachers include isolation (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989), classroom management (Coats & Thoresen, 1978) and general frustrations (Bullough, 1987). Fox and Singleton (1986) found that inexperienced teachers have difficulty adapting to students' needs and abilities. Gordon (1997) reported that "Beginning ... teachers need more than knowledge of content and teaching strategies. Insight into adolescent culture is critical to success in managing a classroom" (p. 56). Lortie (1975) identified isolation as a major obstacle for entry-year teachers, and Rosenholtz (1989) stated, "Most schools are characterized by isolated working conditions where teachers seldom see or hear each other teach" (p. 429).

According to Veenman (1984), the number one problem of entry-year teachers is maintaining classroom discipline. Brock and Grady (1997) attribute this difficulty, at least in part, to the first-year teacher's lack of familiarity with the students' culture: "Novice teachers encounter students whose behaviors are foreign to them. Young themselves, the teachers have difficulty establishing an appropriate social distance" (p. 17).

A second category of literature concerning the problems of beginning teachers includes research that offers solutions to the problems of entry-year teachers. Perhaps the most widely utilized intervention is mentoring. Ponticell and Zepeda (1996) identified eight different ways in which mentors assist novice teachers within the confines of dialogue. Marso and Pigge (1990) concluded that most novice teachers found their mentoring experience helpful. They also found that elementary teachers found their principals as most helpful, whereas secondary teachers believed that other teacher colleagues were more helpful.

**Block Scheduling**

Block scheduling has become the subject of considerable debate. The question of whether block scheduling solves any of the typical problems of public schools is still open to further research. Research has been limited, for the most part, to studies evolving from site evaluations. Due to the individual nature of a school's context, very few generalities can be drawn from the research.

Addressing the organization of the traditional school day, the National Commission on Time and Learning (1994) reported, "we have built a learning enterprise on a foundation of sand" (p. 2). Research
concerning block scheduling has been concentrated in the areas of constituents' perceptions of block and teachers' practices in the block. Davis-Wiley and Cozart (1996) found that parents were most concerned about students' ability to retain learning during extended breaks between sequential courses (e.g., Algebra I and Algebra II). Thomas and O'Connell (1997) reported parents perceived more problems with block scheduling than benefits. The research on teachers' practices revealed while most teachers do not change their practices following the implementation of a block schedule (Pisapia & Westfall, 1997), foreign language, language arts, and science teachers are most likely to make changes (Matthews, Chapman, Flinders, Veal, & Alexander, 1998).

An emerging area of literature concerns supervision and staff development in the block (Zepeda, 1999; Zepeda & Mayers, 2000). Findings of these studies indicate that just as teaching practices need to be retooled for the context of a block schedule, supervisory practices must also be retooled. Zepeda (1999) reported the need for longer pre-observation conferences, observations, and post-observations conferences.

The Study
The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of first-year teachers, to explore their experiences in a block schedule as they negotiated the beginnings of their careers. For this study, first-year teachers were defined as those who had within the past three months graduated from an accredited teacher preparation program. This study lasted one calendar year and included 31 first-year teachers from three urban school districts in the Midwest.

Data Sources
A purposeful sampling was employed to select three urban school districts in a midwestern state that had high schools that utilized a 4 x 4 block schedule. Final district selections were based on urban location, school size, the type of block schedule (e.g., 4 x 4), and a willingness of the districts to participate in this study of first-year teachers on a block schedule. Each high school: 1) enrolled between 1,200 and 2,000 students, 2) included a racially mixed student population, and 3) experienced increased numbers of first-year teachers.

All the high schools in the three districts participated in the study, and from a possible pool of 67 teachers, the 31 first-year teachers who participated held bachelor's degrees from universities and colleges with accredited teacher preparation programs. None held advanced degrees. Table 1 portrays information about the 31 first-year teachers.

Design of the Study
Since no studies on first-year teachers in the block schedule could be located, qualitative approaches were utilized because the "action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs" naturally (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 5). Specifically, a phenomenological approach was employed to examine the participants' shared experiences. It is "... the essence of these experiences [that provides] ... meanings mutually understood through ... [the] phenomenon" (Patton, 1990, p. 70). The phenomenon in this study was the experience of first-year teachers in the block. Our task was "to depict the ... basic structure of [the] experience" (Merriam, 1998, p. 16) of learning to teach on a block schedule. In the tradition of Moustakas (1994), the researchers utilized the data to describe the experiences of first-year teachers on the block "in the light of intuition and self-reflection" (p. 17).
Data collection consisted of four open-ended interviews that were audio-recorded and then later transcribed. In order to chronicle the issues that these first-year teachers on the block experienced, interviews were conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Questions were open-ended in order to 1) minimize the effects of the researchers' biases, 2) produce thick descriptions of the first-year teacher's problems in the block, and 3) allow the first-year teacher's responses to guide the formulation of questions as the interviews proceeded. For example, we asked the first-year teachers to compare and contrast their preservice (e.g., student teaching) experience with that of teaching on a block schedule. We also asked the first-year teachers to talk about their challenges and for them to reflect on their experiences with instruction on an extended block period.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

To establish the rigor necessary for more reliable and stable results in qualitative research, a formal system for data collection and analysis was employed. The data consisted of approximately 140 hours of interview transcription and field notes. The process of analysis was based on repeated sorting and coding, known as the constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method allowed the researchers to reduce the denseness of the data by identifying categories. Then each incident of data was compared with previously identified categories. Following coding, categories were compared to identify emerging themes and patterns. Finally, validation of codes was reaffirmed using selective coding until saturation occurred and no more categories could be identified.

In order to add validity to the findings and our data analysis, member checking was employed, and a random sampling of participants from across the three districts was asked to read the analysis. Specifically, participants were asked to examine the themes and the representative quotes used to illustrate each theme. This allowed the researchers to either confirm or disconfirm the interpretation of the data. Agreement was found across the 16 teachers who read this manuscript.

**Limitations**

The research protocol did not include interviews with the administrators (e.g., principal, assistant principals), department chairpersons (e.g., supervisors), or central office administrators (e.g., director of secondary education, curriculum coordinators). Hence, the data only portrays the voices of the first-year teachers.

**Analysis of the Data**

From the data, three areas emerged as problematic for the 31 first-year teachers in this study: 1) adjusting instruction to extended class period formats, 2) transitioning learning activities, and 3) assessing student progress. Within each of these areas, other issues emerged such as classroom discipline, managing the time needed to plan for instruction, and running out of materials before the end of the period.

**Adjusting Instruction to the Block Schedule**

The first-year teachers in the block reported having difficulties in adjusting their instruction to the extended block periods. The teachers taught four classes daily with each block period lasting
approximately 90 minutes. The issues embedded within this broad area included: 1) managing class
time, 2) varying instruction throughout the period, 3) running out of materials and/or activities before the
end of the period, and 4) relying on a 'single' instructional method.

As one English teacher indicated:

It seemed that class just started and then, 'wham', I had nothing left to do and there was 45 minutes left
... I tried to 'shoot from the hip' and have kids get into groups to discuss the symbolism in Poe ... but
there just was not enough for them to discuss because symbolism was slated to be discussed the next
day ... they weren't prepared and neither was I.

The first-year teachers had a relatively limited number of instructional methods and managing a
classroom from 80 to 100 minutes presented challenges. Participants related difficulties keeping "kids
on task." One social studies teacher commented that:

I really haven't done that [used cooperative learning] yet because whenever I start trying to give them
more freedom like that, they spend time just sitting around ... making jokes.

Another teacher expressed concern about learning "ways to vary instruction that keeps kids' attention ... 
that keeps them motivated."

The first-year teachers indicated that their "student teaching experiences did not parallel teaching on the
block" as these prior experiences were sustained in traditional 48 minute periods. And as a result, the
first-year teachers reported having even less "experience" entering their first teaching position. These
difficulties were exacerbated by the "deceitful amount of time [one] has on an extended block period;"
stated one participant. A foreign language teacher explained it this way:

At face value, 96 minutes is a lot of time ... but things I thought I'd get through I didn't ... I'd let
discussions go on ... It took me almost a month to figure out students knew how to throw the curve ball
so we would not get through all the activities I had planned ... Dreadful amounts of time were wasted
with 'off topic' discussions.

Many of the first-year teachers fell into the trap of teaching until their notes were exhausted. Too many
times, however, the class period had not yet ended and as many teachers indicated, they used
"worksheets, questions at the end of the chapter, and silent reading time" to get through the period.
And, 27 of the 31 teachers indicated, that when all else failed, they had "students do homework" in order
to help keep them "quiet until the bell rang.

A majority of the teachers reported feeling "frustrated" and "stressed out" with the "hum drum" of
following the same "drill" every day. One teacher said:

These are things we do every period: 1) We read from the beginning of a section to the end of a section,
2) We cover the section review questions, then 3) I give them a quiz ... every single day ... 

First-year teachers are least prepared to vary instructional strategies, especially within the same class
period (Livingston & Borko, 1989) and having extended time in the block, created a domino effect for
these teachers. The first-year teachers reported not being in a "good position" to utilize a variety of instructional practices. They reported relying on "straight-forward lectures" and filling in time with "seat work." One teacher indicated:

I used worksheets from another teacher, and I bought a master set of word problems. When I ran out of things to say, I had to give students something to do. When I tried cooperative learning, I couldn't figure out what types of things students should be doing ... students were 'messing around' not really focused on the group project.

Mimicking their college experiences, these first-year teachers reported that they relied on "lectures" and "even more lectures" because they felt comfortable with this instructional method. A math teacher elaborated that he "got fooled [about] the amount of time on the block. It was like being in college ... I had to fill [in] the time somehow." Another teacher accounted that she "pulled out lecture notes from her college lit courses" and another teacher indicated that her "chemistry lab notes" were used to "fill lab time."

The teachers also reported that they often had difficulties "matching what (content) was being taught" with "how to teach." Experimentation proved to be problematic in that the teachers reported "frustration" with "aborted attempts" with methods that stayed "too far from the control" of the lecture format. One first year teacher reported that she felt "a loss of control over the class" when she tried "any method that students had to leave their seats."

Another teacher reported that "the noise level got out of control" when students transitioned from large group to small-group activities. She further reported that she "lost too much time getting kids back from group work" and that too much of her energy "got zapped from keeping the 'lid on the situation.'"

Nearly every first-year teacher expressed concern about student discipline and their inability to keep activities running smoothly. Perhaps, the most complex for these first-year teachers was the time it took to transition from one classroom activity to another.

Transitioning Learning Activities

Due to the extended nature of a block period, utilizing a variety of instructional strategies is desirable. In a block schedule, the transition from one activity to another is an instructional activity (Zepeda & Mayers, 2000). In a traditional class period (45-50 minutes), there are typically fewer instructional activities. Transitions from one activity to the next are brief and punctuated, functioning as a classroom management strategy. This was not the case for the first-year teachers in the block. The teachers discovered that maintaining a climate conducive to learning in a block period required well-planned transitions from one learning activity to the next. Without transitions, "students messed around too much" and transition time became "a signal to misbehave" one teacher reported. She further elaborated that depending on the curricular connection between activities "transition time takes 'more time' because of the impact it (the transition) has to the upcoming activity." This teacher reported spending an entire weekend "setting up learning stations for kids to post their work and pick up materials and directions for the next activity" in her lesson. She concluded:
Kids made too much noise ... they distracted themselves ... they made a real mess of things, and I had to intervene too much ... this got me off track on what I was going to do next ... this took time away from the next learning activity.

Transitioning difficulties, along with a limited number of instructional strategies, often put the first-year teachers at odds with knowing what to do. For example, the teachers reported feeling "under the gun" to cover content found in district mandated curriculum guides, yet they did not understand "how to get the kids through this stuff' in an orderly manner. One teacher reported:

I spoon-fed the kids what they had to know ... my lecture notes chronicled coverage ... but I just couldn't get past one activity per class session getting the kids from one activity to the next put a damper on things because I had to play 'good cop, bad cop.'

Because the first-year teachers had difficulties managing transitions between activities, they reported utilizing only one or two instructional methods and students were more often than not, "doomed to their seats" as several teachers reported. The teachers reported that the students were "miserable," "bored," and generally "frustrated" with having to "stay put in their seats." One teacher reported that the only transition she gave was a "stretch break" and another teacher reported that she "bribed kids to cooperate" by giving a "five-minute bathroom break." Not connected to learning, transitions only provided for "relief' from learning.

Why were these teachers afraid of "losing control" of students? Many teachers indicated that they were "fearful that an administrator would walk in and see chaos." As one first-year teacher stated, "I am supposed to be in control of my classroom, and if my A. P. (assistant principal) walks in ... I'm in for it--deep." Similar accounts were offered by the first-year teachers, with one teacher indicating, "Our evaluation is based on maintaining an 'orderly environment conducive to student learning.'" He further stated that "the veteran teachers were there to help;" however, he was "leery of letting anyone know" that he was "having difficulties managing a group of ninth graders."

Related to instruction is assessment of student learning and progress toward meeting course objectives. The teachers in this study were concerned that their students were being "shorted" by pen and paper assessments because they did not utilize a variety of learning strategies, and the instructional methods utilized, did not provide opportunities for students to be engaged in active construction of knowledge by doing.

Assessing Student Progress

Assessing student progress was problematic for the first-year teachers on the block. The "New Kids" found that traditional pencil and paper tests could not adequately assess gains in student learning. Yet, assessments that relied on performance--what students could do--were almost non-existent because the teachers relied on "seat work" out of fear of "losing control" of the learning environment.

Two reasons for this difficulty emerged. First, student learning did not occur in a context of diverse instructional strategies such as Socratic seminars, cooperative learning, or simulations. Second, the first-year teachers did not have a strong enough working knowledge of how to implement diverse
learning strategies that would have allowed for more authentic types of assessment. The teachers were more centered on "absolute accountability" in regard to assessment. One teacher indicated, "The grade book doesn't lie ... grades tell a story of what has been mastered ... what the student knows." Another teacher reported that "keeping grades other than test and quizzes just becomes too complex."

When the teachers tried to assess students more authentically, they struggled with knowing "how much value" should be placed on assessments "other than what could be handed in and graded." This view of assessment was further complicated with the position believed by many that "only the teacher could accurately assess" students' learning. Although one teacher believed that "students should be able to assess their own work" and this type of assessment was perhaps more "powerful" than the "teacher always being the final judge," she could not "let go" of what she thought was her duty. Another teacher indicated that he would not be in a defensible position "if a semester grade would be challenged by a student or parent." He further elaborated:

The administration stresses accountability and student achievement colleges and universities want hard core grades and reports of student achievement ... how can information like, 'Johnny can draw great pictures depicting the weapons used in Romeo and Juliet' be of benefit? ... If I can't give it an objective grade, I'm not going to assign it.

This same teacher kept focused on "how" to assess "Johnny's drawing skills" and whether or not "Johnny could draw great pictures depicting the weapons used in Romeo and Juliet" could be linked to learning objectives. He also indicated that "You can't say, 'The shape of the swords are unique ... that's an A' and then expect the grade to hold up under scrutiny."

Several of the teachers also believed that, without clear uniformity in grading, they could be accused of "not having standards." Many also believed students could possibly see them as "being weak" or "playing favorites" by other students. The teachers also feared having to "defend themselves to angry parents" if a grade was challenged. One teacher indicated that when she graded students on a group project, a parent "protested her son's grade ... because according to her son, 'he worked harder than the other kids in the group.'" This teacher concluded, "I will never be held hostage again ... cooperative learning and group projects are history."

The first-year teachers did not realize that alternate forms of assessment can be quantified by criteria matched to learning objectives through rubrics that specify levels of mastery. The use of diverse teaching methods necessitates the use of equally diverse assessment techniques. While pencil and paper tests can still be useful for evaluating student mastery of some skills, using alternative assessment strategies permit students with diverse learning styles to demonstrate what they have learned. Because of their inexperience with designing activities that could be alternatively assessed coupled with the pressures of accountability, the first-year teachers "played it safe" and utilized "pen and paper" assessments.

**Conclusions**

This study sought to discover the perspectives of first-year high school teachers who were teaching in a block schedule. We wanted to know what issues or problems the first-year teachers experienced while teaching on the block. Teaching on a block schedule is a complex venture, regardless of the experience
level of teachers. Longer class periods require careful planning, utilization of a variety of instructional methods, and diverse student assessment practices to complement extended learning opportunities. Utilizing these skills are, however, more problematic for teachers who do not have fully developed skills in these areas. This is especially true for the "new kids" on the block schedule.

With a small sample size of 31 first-year teachers, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this study across every high school context. However, the findings bear some weight in that the 31 first-year teachers were studied across three urban school districts in seven different high schools. There are implications for the types of support that school systems can give to first-year teachers, and although not the intent of this study, there are implications for teacher preparation programs that can, perhaps, serve to further collaboration between K-12 school systems and institutions of higher education.

For high schools that are on the block schedule, first-year teachers need systematic support from a variety of sources including principals, department chairs, and mentors. First-year teachers need immediate assistance in planning for extended class periods and long-term support in learning how to achieve course goals and objectives over a shorter period of time as each course on a 4 x 4 block schedule is finished in sixteen weeks. During the hiring process, administrators need to find out whether student teaching or other field experiences were part of the candidate's preparation program. From this information, assistance can be adjusted to the individual needs of the new hires.

Staff development needs to become a priority for first-year teachers in the block; otherwise, their skills will remain behind teachers who have experienced the transition to the block prior to their arrival. As schools transition to the block schedule, there is typically a great deal of staff development to assist teachers in readying their instruction to teach on the block. Moreover, staff development is usually part of a long-term transition plan that includes follow-up activities during the first year or two of implementation of a block schedule.

If a school system has been on a block for several years, staff development focusing on the most rudimentary of skills are not offered as it is assumed that the majority of teachers are proficient with these skills. In most schools, learning opportunities are designed for the mean; therefore, the newest members of the school are left behind their peers. Further exacerbating being left behind, if staff development opportunities are beyond the range of learning for the first-year teacher, then learning advanced techniques, creates frustration--for both the teachers and the students. Effective staff development and supervision are differentiated to meet more than the needs of the mean of any given faculty. As more schools are faced with hiring teachers to replace those who are retiring or otherwise leaving the profession, the mean of the school will change with newer teachers being in the majority. This trend should guide school systems as they prepare staff development and other types of long-term support for new teachers.

Due to the subject specialization found in the content areas in high schools, attention needs to be focused on varying instructional activities that can work alongside traditional lectures such as cooperative learning, Socratic questioning, the utilization of technology, and transition techniques. Feedback from department chairs, mentors, peers, and supervisors should be available to provide needed assistance in refining practices. This assumes, however, that collaboration and assistance are embedded in the norms and values of the school's culture.
The multi-dimensional nature of teaching within a specified classroom context, necessitates more holistic approaches to the support first-year teachers need. Because of varying degrees of faulty planning, shaky transitions, and the "hum drum" of following the same routine on a daily basis, students act out and this behavior distracts the learning process. Often, disruptions have a cumulative effect with compromises made in the classroom. Teachers, in turn, try to control student behavior with content and a single, one-dimensional instructional strategy--lecturing--which puts the teacher in a power-authority stance over students and their learning.

Perhaps, more specifically, the question should be "How does staff development and supervision need to be different on the block for first-year teachers?" To assist the "new kids" acclimate to teaching in the block, staff development needs to be job-embedded where "learning occurs as teachers ... engage in their daily work activities" (Wood & Killian, 1998, p. 52). Embedding learning in teachers' everyday work provides opportunities for timely feedback and promotes transfer of newly learned skills into practice (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wood, 1989). The "sit and get," "sage on the stage," and "deficit" models of staff development that have permeated schools will yield less than satisfactory results for first-year teachers.

Peer coaching is a model that can promote more active learning based on the immediate experiences and needs of first-year teachers on the block. New teachers to the block need time to observe in experienced teachers' classrooms. Seeing and hearing an experienced teacher can help novices learn how to utilize different instructional strategies that are more appropriate to the extended length of a block period. Moreover, experienced teachers (coaches) need time to observe novices and time to engage the novice in extended dialogue about the events of the classroom. Feedback is critical and according to McGreal (1983), "The more teachers talk about teaching, the better they get at it" (p. 44). Although dialogue before and feedback and extended discussion after classroom observations are critical, they are not enough for the first-year teacher, however. Follow-up learning efforts are even more critically important for the first-year teacher and should include ongoing discussion, the sharing of materials, and the examination of student work and other artifacts that can assist in helping to make sense of what instructional efforts and learning activities yield what results.

New teachers on the block need to stay engaged in long-term learning. Infrequent supervision by an assistant principal or the principal is not enough. Lunch periods and planning periods need to be utilized in order to create a forum for dialogue concerning teaching and learning. First-year teachers need to be paired with their coaches prior to the school year so that relationships can be built. Coaches and first-year teacher's schedules need to be arranged so that they share common planning and lunch periods. Ideally, the classrooms of the coach and first-year teacher should be in close proximity. Likewise, the schedules of the first-year teachers can be arranged in such a way that clusters of first-year teachers share the same lunch and preparation periods.

Attending to these scheduling issues can create a safety-net of support. With the safety-net cast in this way, more opportunities for interaction, classroom observations, and other purposeful staff development opportunities can become part of the school day for the first-year teachers and those who are assisting them to transition to their new role as professional educator. Administratively, these details can easily be attended to while building the master schedule.
Materials and resources such as videotape recorders, paraprofessional staff, and substitute teachers can be utilized to assist first-year teachers on the block. Paraprofessionals such as library media aides can be assigned to videotape first-year teachers who can then later view the tape by themselves, with a coach, or other first-year teacher. Many districts have television stations and hence have personnel who can be utilized to assist. Substitute teachers who are hired for the full day but who are not deployed every period can be assigned to substitute for either a first-year teacher or his/her coach.

Often department chairs are released a portion of the day to work with teachers, and they can be utilized to provide assistance with designing tailor-made learning opportunities for new teachers. For departments who have large numbers of first-year teachers, staff development funds need to be provided so that learning opportunities can be afforded to these departments. More opportunities for substitutes to be available so teachers can work with each other need to be provided.

In a department that has hired three or four first-year teachers, the utilization of the department chair needs to be examined. Perhaps some of the "paper work" associated with the department could be handled by a secretary. If department chairs are released during the day to attend to related tasks and responsibilities, they should be encouraged to spend a majority of their time working with the new kids on the block.

Traditional in-service can be linked to peer coaching by conducting classroom observations just prior to professional development workshops and then conducting follow-up observations and subsequent discussions immediately following. By linking peer observations and follow-up discussions to professional development workshops, skills learned in these workshops can be reinforced and increase the likelihood that skills will be transferred to practice.

Data needs to drive all staff development. Peer coaching can provide valuable information for the planning of staff development activities tailored more immediately to the needs of first-year teachers. Schools that have first-year teachers need to develop mechanisms for coaches to share the needs of first-year teachers with those who plan staff development at both the building and district levels. In order not to compromise the trust relationship between coach and first-year teacher, surveys can be developed in such a way as to not disclose the identity of teachers who may be struggling and need more immediate assistance. Staff development opportunities can be modified through such data so that skills that first-year teachers have already mastered are not duplicated. Data collection and analysis need to be continuous activities.

Colleges and universities can learn some lessons, too, from this study. There are approximately 18,000 high schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999), and according to Cawalti (1994), over half of them utilize some form of block scheduling. The university personnel responsible for coordinating field and student teaching experiences for those in secondary education preparation programs need to make a conscious effort to place students in a school that employs a block schedule, regardless of the type of block (e.g., 4 x 4, alternating day, Copernican). All these formats offer instruction on an extended time format. Perhaps, through articulation with high school personnel, methods courses for secondary education majors can be adjusted to include topics related to teaching on the block. Moreover, college professors need to become "part of the loop" by assisting with workshops on professional development days, observing in classrooms, and facilitating follow-up.
discussions with not only preservice teachers, but also with first-year teachers who are teaching on the block. Both K-12 systems and institutions of higher education will be stronger as a result of this type of collaboration.

**Summary**
The new kids on the block had a great deal to say about their first year of teaching on an extended format. Were the problems that the first-year teachers on the block different from those of high school teachers that did not teach on a block schedule? That is a question that begs for further investigation. There are many issues that must be considered when a school offers instruction on an extended time format. One of the areas that needs further investigation is the type of support that first-year teachers receive from administrators, department chairs, and others (e.g., mentors, grade-level coordinators) who work with them. With impending teacher shortages and the number of teachers who 'take flight' from the trenches within the first three years of their careers, we owe it to our profession to make this line of inquiry a top priority.

**Table 1 First-year Teachers**
Legend for Chart:

A – School  
B – Number of First-Year Teachers  
C – Subject Areas

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<th>B</th>
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<td>English (2),</td>
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<td>Social Studies (1)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English (1), Math (3), Science (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taft 6 English (3), Science (2), Social Studies (1)

Totals

n - 3 districts n = 31 teachers English, n = 16

n = 7 schools Math, n = 8
Social Studies, n = 2
Science, n = 4
Spanish, n = 1

References


http://web.a.ebscohost.com.sled.idm.oclc.org/ehost/delivery?sid=a3f8a067-9f6a-4cau-b0b4-156118359a10%40sessionmgr4001&vid=11&hid=4104&ReturnUrl=ht... 14/15


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