

Trimester Discussion Comment Card Questions

1. How, what will be the program evaluation for the trimester proposal if implemented?

The school district will measure the effectiveness of the proposed trimester the same way all academic programs are measured in the school district – through the use of the following criteria: (1) performance on external standardized test results, (2) student, teacher and parent feedback and comments, (3) performance on internal assessment tools, (4) performance as compared to the District Goals as endorsed by the Board of Education and (5) administrative review. The school district has always had a standard to measure its performance. The proposed implementation of the trimester schedule would be measured using the same criteria.

2. With the trimester schedule what happens when a child misses a week of school due to illness or what have you?

A week-long absence, especially an unscheduled one, poses challenges for a student in any schedule. In the trimester, students would be responsible for connecting with four or five teachers to learn about missed class work and notes, out-of-class assignments and assessments, and the like. In the current schedule, students are responsible for making up for lost time in six or seven courses.

3. Was the High School Schedule Team biased?

No, the committee was not biased. The study team was formed with the idea of gathering as many opinions concerning the topic as possible. The study team disagreed with one another on a number of different issues during the six-month life span of the group. The study team had representation of parents, students, teachers, the Board of Education and administration.

4. Why change the schedule of a great school? Do we really need to move this quickly?

As a result of the changing landscape of school finance, the Mequon-Thiensville School District and Homestead High School have been changing over the past ten years without much notice from the public. In the past ten years, we have reduced services and laid employees as a result of limited revenue and diminishing resources. The high school is currently using an academic schedule. The 6 of 7 has the potential of negatively impacting the performance of our students. We have to change if we intent to continue to be the very best we can be in the future.

The school district is not moving quickly on this issue. Following months of study, the public had five informational sessions available in April and May. The Board will deliberate, listen and possibility take a vote on the trimester proposal in July 2011, after three months of community input.

5. How will HHS prepare the teachers and curriculum for the trimester schedule?

The administration at the high school will use the 2011-2012 school year to prepare teachers to provide instruction in a trimester format, if the proposal is approved. The year long professional development will help teachers make the transition. The high school will also provide parents and students with professional development opportunities to learn more about the trimester process next year, if the proposal is approved.

6. How will scheduling core classes such as AP classes, math and foreign languages occur? What is the impact on class sizes?

Student enrollment determines the number of sections of a class, just as is the case in the current semester schedule regardless of course or content area. Regarding placement of courses on the master schedule—meaning which trimester(s) and hour(s) that a course is taught—Homestead’s student management system, PowerSchool, will build the first draft of the lay-out of classes. The computer program is equipped to review all course selections and to place classes so that the highest possible number of students who request a course can actually take it. Parameters can and will be placed on the placement of classes based on educational needs; for example, two-trimester AP courses will be required to run during first and second trimester. The principal, director of counseling, and department chair(s) will adjust to the computer-generated schedule as necessary to best meet the educational needs of students, just as is done in the current system.

If a student has a math or world language course in the first two trimesters of the school year and receives a schedule for the following school year that places the next course in the sequence in the second and third trimesters (creating a gap of two trimesters plus the summer), that student can request a schedule change so that the course begins in the first trimester during year two. This schedule change request may have an impact on other course selections that the student has made.

Regarding class size changes the change to the trimester will result in an average class size increase of 1.5 students per class. Not all classes will see an increase in size; in fact, depending on course preferences, some classes may see a size decrease. As is the case in the current schedule, the exact class size for any course or any section of a course will fluctuate on a year-by-year basis and will be determined largely by student course choices and staffing limitations.

7. Why is Mequon-Thiensville out alone in looking at this system? What about comparable Districts like the University School, Brookfield Central, and Whitefish Bay?

Currently, the Mequon-Thiensville School District and Homestead High School is alone in having teachers teach six classes out of a possible seven. Comparable schools cited in your question do not have their teachers instructing as many classes in one school day. The community allowed the implementation of the 6/7 schedule without any concern for Homestead and comparing to other high achieving districts. It is difficult, if not impossible for a high quality high school like Homestead to be on a 6/7 schedule.

8. Why would we want to tamper with a system that is recognized as a quality program?

The administrative team desires to improve the current system because we do not believe that the 6/7 schedule is sustainable. We cannot ensure academic excellence for the long term with the current schedule.

9. Who benefits? Teachers or students?

The proposed change benefits both teachers and students. If teachers are available to provide their best possible instruction in a trimester schedule, the students will also benefit. If the teachers are able to provide additional extra help, assign more engaging and rigorous assignments, and provide more informative feedback on assignments, the students are the true beneficiaries of the proposed schedule change.

10. Could you provide an extra hour for preparation (student contact, grading, lesson preparation) to those areas of instruction that demand more teacher prep time?

If Homestead keeps its current semester schedule, the addition of preparation time for teachers is not cost-neutral. Whenever a teacher has an additional hour of preparation, someone else needs

to teach the class that would have been part of that teacher's assignment had the extra preparation period not been provided. To illustrate, if a department has 10 full-time teachers, each of whom have one preparation period per semester (two per year), those teachers teach 60 sections per semester (120 per year). If the teachers were assigned an additional preparation period, those teachers would teach 50 sections per semester (100 per year). Additional faculty members would need to be hired to teach those 20 sections that would be unassigned. Twenty sections equates to two additional teachers.

11. How will you address the instructional gaps?

Although instructional gaps within the trimester proposal was a concern for the study team and administrative team, our professional development planned is designed to alleviate the issue. Brain based research reveals that the most important element of learning is how much a student retains. Student learning should be centered on teaching for understanding and application. Under a proposed trimester, students will be asked to study for fewer classes than the current schedule requires, which can increase what students are able to retain. Regardless of the schedule, all teachers review and re-teach. This will be no different under a proposed trimester schedule. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that the high school curriculum is not developed as a looping curriculum. Concepts from past courses are necessary to build a knowledge base, but the gap in instruction will not prevent a student from achievement because teachers will be committed to reviewing and re teaching content

12. How will the trimester proposal assist the average student?

The average student benefits from the trimester proposal in the following ways:

- (1) More efficient feedback from teachers. In the trimester, teachers have a reduced student load, which allows them to give better and more complete feedback to students on written assignments and assessments in a timelier manner. Educational research indicates that the quality and timeliness of feedback are key factors in student learning.
- (2) Personal contact with teachers. In extended periods, teachers have more opportunity to interact with individual students during the learning process. Individualized attention helps the average student to improve comprehension of course content.
- (3) Diversity of teaching methods. In extended periods, teachers are required to incorporate a variety of instructional methods into any given lesson. Students who may not always function best in a lecture-oriented setting will have increased opportunities to learn in different ways that might better compliment their learning style.
- (4) Focus of study. Many students, even highly successful ones, have difficulty managing the volume of expectations, assignments, deadlines, etc. that come with having six or seven classes at a time. In the trimester, students can focus on fewer topics and responsibilities at once, allowing them to get the most out of those classes.
- (5) Extra schedule space. If a student is not enrolled in any three-trimester courses, that student has an extra space on his/her schedule. Some students may prefer to take an additional one-trimester class. Other students may prefer to add a term of study hall. In the trimester, students have the ability, as much as is possible, to schedule a study hall by season, which may be preferred for students in sports or other co-curricular activities.
- (6) Inclusion of flex time. Flex time allows any student to access a teacher for support, clarification, or re-teaching without needing to squeeze that time into their out-of-school schedules. This increased access to teachers can help an average student to experience greater levels of academic success.

13. What was the intention of the HSST? Did the mission focus on benefiting teachers?

The true intention of the high school study team was to improve the current state of instruction at Homestead High School. As the educational leaders of the organization, it was clear to administration that the current 6/7 schedule was not benefiting students or teachers. Instead of allowing the system to fail, we formed a study team to seek solutions to the current situation.

14. How can the trimester proposal increase teacher collaboration?

The proposed trimester schedule will require teachers to align assessments and coordinate assignments. The proposed trimester schedule requires greater synchronized teaching in like content areas. The need to collaborate and discuss issues as partners will increase in under this proposed teaching model. The ability to apply instruction independent of discussing the content with peers is limited under the proposed trimester model. Overall, this is a benefit for students if teachers are more tightly aligned.

15. Why does music have to be a three-term class?

After studying various trimester schools' approach to music programming, the members of the schedule study team unanimously agreed that music courses should be three terms in length. Unlike all other classes offered at Homestead, the enrollment in the class has a significant impact on the quality of the class itself. Certain pieces of music are viable choices for high school groups only when certain voices or instruments are present and when a certain sound can be achieved. Significant fluctuations in the make-up of music classes from trimester to trimester could have a significant adverse effect on those classes, one of Homestead's greatest assets to students and the community. Further, because music staffing is not determined by enrollment in the same way that teacher staffing is decided in all other content areas, creating three-trimester music courses has no financial impact. Finally, if a student enrolls in a three-trimester music course, that student still has 12 other slots or spaces on his/her schedule to fill with academic classes and/or study halls.

16. What does a sample schedule look like?

Sample student schedules have been provided and are currently available on the District website. A master schedule—a grid listing what classes are taught when and by whom—cannot be created until after students have registered for classes. Student registrations determine the number of sections and teachers needed for courses across the school. Recently, the school has been asked to take the current schedule and turn it into a trimester schedule. Doing so would not reflect the actual schedule that would exist at Homestead in 2012-2013 and beyond. School officials cannot know fully how a change to the trimester schedule will affect enrollment patterns due to questions like:

- Will students take the same number of courses?
- Will certain courses become more or less popular?
- How many students will enroll in the three new AP courses that will be offered in 2012-2013?

All of these questions and many more affect the design of the master schedule.

17. Has the school district considered the impact of families not enrolling at Homestead if the proposal is passed?

Yes, the school district has considered the impact of families leaving the school district. The loss of any family is harmful to the school district. However, over the past ten years of declining resources, we have seen families leave the district for a number of other reasons (closing of Range Line School, increased class sizes at the elementary level, other). The district always seeks to have the most effective and successful systems in place to attract families.

18. Why doesn't the school district use the tools from Act 10 to reduce the compensation of all employees to pay for the return of a 5/7 schedule?

The school district is using the tools made available in Act 10. Administration does not endorse the reduction of employee compensation anymore than already proposed to cover the cost of re-implementing a 5/7 schedule. Effective July 1, 2011, all employees in the school district will pay 5.8% of their pension costs, a change health care and dental care carriers and increase their employee contribution in health insurance. The employees have seen a significant change in their compensation as a result of Act 10. Some will argue that the school district could reduce more compensation. Any further reduction of compensation would place the school district in a competitive disadvantage. In further reducing compensation, we risk losing the instructional foundation of our school district, the teachers. The school district has invested significant financial and human capital in our teachers.