

Dear MCCSC Families & Staff,

Each day, MCCSC celebrates our high performing schools that do wonderful things for students and our community. We are guided in our work to lead with critical consciousness through an equity-centered approach, as outlined in our strategic plan adopted in 2021. We remain committed to identifying and eliminating systemic barriers for our priority populations for whom our current methodologies and structures are not fully meeting their needs. These inequitable outcomes drive us towards continued improvement and a desire to implement necessary and positive change.

Why does this work matter and why is MCCSC considering changes to our high school schedules? We began by asking guiding questions: 1) In what ways do various bell schedules promote or advance the definition of educational equity? 2) Who benefits from our current schedules and who is disadvantaged? and 3) How do our current schedules allow, or not allow, students to flex time for additional learning? Ultimately, our foundational priorities for this work are maximizing student learning and maximizing student opportunities and access. This is why we feel compelled to implement changes to strategies, procedures and structures when doing so can help these foundational priorities. This is the “why?” and this is what drives this work.

As part of our 2021 strategic plan, MCCSC continues to study student performance and other key outcome data, including graduation rates, discipline, course enrollment and performance data, school enrollment data, attendance rates, student survey data, and so much more. These data are being disaggregated across priority populations. MCCSC administrators share relevant data as part of the strategic plan at monthly public Board meetings. Past presentations and additional details on this work can be found at www.mccsc.edu/strategicplan.

In May 2023, a high school experience survey was completed by 61.5% of students. As part of the survey, some students indicated a concern for the length of individual classes. Currently, Bloomington High School North (BHSN) classes are 80 minutes. As part of the student survey, 38% of BHSN students stated that classes were too long (with a higher percentage of students on free/reduced (F/R) lunch stating that classes were too long). Supporting this student concern, significant research have concluded that teenager engagement is reduced when classes are too long. Additionally, some subjects, such as math and foreign language, benefit from more frequent repetition; this is especially true for students of poverty from disinvested communities. The current practice of attending classes at BHSN an average of 2.5 days a week disproportionately impacts our priority populations due to infrequent opportunities for regular instruction and interaction with teachers.

While a recent letter from BHSS teachers and staff indicated that equity exists by placing students in “long classes” for subjects like Algebra I, Algebra II, English 9, English 10, English 11 through “tracking the needs of students,” this practice creates greater inequities in course access and opportunities. The current practice defined by BHSS teachers results in students being assigned varying credits for each course (i.e. two trimesters vs. three trimesters) and has resulted in 54% of students on F/R taking classes in the arts and 36% of students with dis/abilities taking classes in the arts. This is compared to 65% of all other students who take classes in the arts. In short, the practice of “tracking” students in the trimester

system has resulted in inequities.

Earlier this school year, MCCSC reviewed student transfers between high schools with different schedules (i.e. semesters vs. trimesters). For each of these schedule designs, pacing guides and other curricular considerations can vary greatly. Over the past five years, more than 100 transfers to or from an MCCSC high school occurred where schedules were not aligned, and 55% of the transfers were students on F/R lunch. Moreover, these identified transfers were twice as likely to be Black/African-American students. Course access and opportunities can be improved for all by aligning school schedules. Bloomington High School North teachers recently wrote, “Equity is options,” but this is only true when these options also exist for our historically and systemically marginalized populations; otherwise, it is options for some.

As an administrative team charged with implementing an equity-centered strategic plan, status quo is not acceptable when the beneficiaries of the current schedule design are less complex, less diverse, and have fewer exceptions than our overall student body.

To provide greater time to prepare for schedule changes, coupled with a desire to clarify misinformation regarding potential schedules, MCCSC administration has identified the key features of next year’s schedule. This information will allow principals more time to finalize details within their schools based upon additional school-based needs.

Therefore, MCCSC administration has announced the following schedule features for the 2024-2025 school year:

1) 60-minute classes.

A hybrid block will be implemented that rotates the daily classes that are held. Unlike the current block schedule at BHSN where four 80-minute classes are taken each day, the new schedule will allow for 60 minutes of instruction per class. A 60-minute class closely reflects the current amount of time for each class at BHSS. BHSS staff recently shared that a 60-minute class “provide[s] an adequate amount of class time for labs” and supports the sciences, practical arts, performing arts, and fine arts.

2) 16 credits (8 credits per semester on a hybrid block).

A 16-credit schedule will avoid many of the concerns stated by students and teachers related to fewer credits, less ability to enroll in the arts, less chance for early graduation, and other similar concerns. BHSN teachers have shared repeated concerns that *“all BHSN students will lose elective course opportunities...[which will] directly undermine North’s longstanding culture of inclusive programming and diverse opportunities. Students will have fewer chances to engage in music, arts, athletic training, family/consumer sciences, internships and special education/ENL resources.”*

Fortunately, these commonly shared concerns for credit loss and exploratory class enrollment decreases will be addressed by creating an alternate schedule that maintains, at a minimum, the same number of credits that exist in the current schedule.

3) Intervention opportunities.

Students, teachers, and principals have reiterated the benefit and need for consistent access to intervention and academic support. Intervention time is an integral part of our Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework. Therefore, the new schedule format will contain guaranteed intervention time that will be customized based on individual building needs.

What impact will this have on MCCSC high school teachers? MCCSC teachers have shared concerns for the collaborative development of “four-year course plans based on consistent and predictable course offerings.” Fortunately, a new schedule that maintains 16 credits will not hinder these previously-developed plans. Moreover, MCCSC’s new strategic staffing design, implemented at the elementary level for the 2023-2024 school year, and being implemented through this schedule change, will allow for increased preparatory time for new teachers and teachers who need additional support, while guaranteeing the district-established average minimum amount of preparatory time of 200 minutes per week for all teachers.

MCCSC officials will continue teacher focus groups to provide input on the schedule. As we begin to prepare for the 2024-2025 school year, MCCSC will provide collaboration time and professional development opportunities for teachers who need additional time and support to prepare for the upcoming school year. Further, as the Indiana State Department of Education continues to revise Indiana Academic Standards, required curricular changes will be made easier by all high school teachers at a district level working collaboratively, thus saving significant time and energy required at each individual school.

Focus groups for community members will continue as planned with an opportunity for feedback on the 2024-2025 schedule features as well as time for community members to share other ideas and suggestions for the upcoming school year.

In closing, we sincerely apologize for the delay in providing this information. We will immediately begin work with our students and staff to prepare for the 2024-2025 school year and we look forward to the new access and opportunities that will be created by these improvements. The new schedule changes will create increased options for students in a more equitable manner and, as well-stated by teachers at BHSS, “Confirm our commitment to equity...[and give every student] a chance at success, whatever they determine their success to be.”