

TOBY HIRSCH and LUCAS GAZIANIS

THE OPPORTUNITY BLOCK

The implementation of the opportunity block was promised to bring about two major benefits: more personalized learning and less missed class time for athletes. Over the first several months of its existence, we have observed the following successes and limitations of the opportunity block.

SUCSESSES

1. **Less Time Missed for Athletes** - Athletes have missed less class time. It goes without saying that athletes miss less class time when they have to leave early, but the effect is magnified by the fact that, in many cases, the only reason athletes leave early is to avoid the end of school traffic. In these cases, athletes will no longer have to miss any class time, instead departing at the beginning of the opportunity block.
2. **More Opportunities for Clubs** - Students, particularly athletes, have more opportunities to participate in clubs. Because most clubs meet after school, when athletes are practicing, it used to be very difficult for them to participate in clubs. Now, they can theoretically attend up to eight clubs during the opportunity block.
3. **Easier Teacher Meetings** - Students can, in some cases, meet more easily with teachers. Students whose schedules would otherwise restrict their ability to get extra help before or after school or during opens now have a time where they are likely to be able to meet with their teachers.

LIMITATIONS

1. **Limited Opportunities** - The opportunities available during the opportunity block are very limited compared to those available after school. Only about 5% of students are signed up for opportunities on an average day.¹ This is because teachers had to specifically apply to meet during the opportunity block, many club leaders were not aware of the procedures to meet during the block, and many teachers are not available for opportunities because they have classes.
2. **Unproductive for Homework** - The opportunity block has been an unproductive environment for students seeking to do their homework. Most students are tired and unfocused by the time the opportunity block starts and do not want to work, making it a distracting environment for those legitimately seeking to work.
3. **Lack of Flexibility** - The implementation of the opportunity block has made it less flexible than any other block during the day. During most blocks, students can either a) sign up for a class or b) have an open. During the opportunity block, students can either a) sign up for an opportunity or b) stay in their last block classes. Because students must commit to opportunities for an entire semester, they are no more flexible than classes during the day, and their alternative is less flexible than during the day.
4. **Unproductive Teacher Meetings** - Because teachers often have classes during their last block, it can be difficult for them to productively meet with students when they have a last block class. These classrooms are often very noisy and distracting, and teachers have to oversee their students, diverting their focus away from the meeting.
5. **Jobs/Internships** - Students cannot leave for jobs or internships if they have class last block.

¹Per Mr. Piotrowski's announcement, fewer than 1,100 requests in total were received for opportunity enrollment. If all 2,700 Greenwich High School students had requested opportunities all eight days of the cycle, there would be $8 * 2,700 = 21,600$ requests. $1,100 / 21,600 = 0.051 = 5.1\%$. This figure is larger than the actual number of students enrolled in opportunities, because not every request was accepted.

Opportunity Period Implementation Plan

1. **Phase One** | Students will not be required to stay in their last block. Approved clubs will be allowed to meet during the opportunity block. Because this is still part of the academic day, clubs will be held to a more rigorous standard. They will be required to concretely demonstrate their value in one or more of the following fields:
 - a. **academics.** Clubs that promote skills in STEM, humanities, foreign language, or the fine arts will be allowed to meet. Examples of this include:
 - i. Debate (humanities)
 - ii. Math team (STEM)
 - iii. Coding club (STEM)
 - iv. Art club (fine arts)
 - v. Italian club (language)
 - b. **college or career preparation.** Clubs that promote college readiness or teach students a trade will be allowed to meet. Examples of this include:
 - i. Finance club
 - ii. Entrepreneurship club
 - iii. SAT/ACT prep club
 - c. **life skills or virtues.** Clubs that promote civic engagement, cultural awareness, or other important values for effective citizenship should be allowed to meet. Examples of this include:
 - i. Model UN club
 - ii. Social justice club
 - iii. AIDS awareness club
 - iv. Write for change club
 - v. Young Democrats/Republicans

Existing clubs will have to apply to student activities to meet during this period.

2. **Phase Two** | Create an additional wave of busses, move to hub system, adjust times. Introduce accredited courses for the 2:45-3:30 period. Courses would include PE classes, remedial core courses, and additional electives. Students could also continue meeting for clubs during this time or in the 3:30-4:30 period.
 - a. **Mandatory Class Time**
 - i. **8:30-2:45**
 - ii. **Bus Wave I: 2:55**
 - b. **Opportunity Period**
 - i. **2:50-3:35**
 - ii. **Bus Wave II: 3:45**
 - c. **After School**
 - i. **3:40 on**
 - ii. **Bus Wave III: 4:35**
3. **Phase Three** | Create another opportunity period at the beginning of the day. Any classes could meet during this opportunity period, including core classes. Create an additional wave of busses and convert to hub system.
 - a. **Morning Opportunity Period**
 - i. **8:30-9:15**
 - ii. **Bus Wave A: 8:15**
 - iii. **Bus Wave B: 9:05**

- b. Mandatory Class Time**
 - i. 9:20-2:45**
 - ii. Bus Wave I: 2:55**
- c. Afternoon Opportunity Period**
 - i. 2:50-3:35**
 - ii. Bus Wave II: 3:45**
- d. After School**
 - i. 3:40 on**
 - ii. Bus Wave III: 4:35**

To accommodate this change, GHS would adopt a six day cycle (see appendix A), not including the opportunity periods, with one block dropping every day. This means that blocks meet for 55 minutes on $\frac{5}{6}$ days, equating to an average of 45.8 minutes in each class per day. In the 2017-18 schedule, classes met for 58 minutes on $\frac{3}{4}$ days, averaging only 43.5 minutes per class per day.

Does this address the limitations of the opportunity block?

We identified the five biggest limitations of the opportunity block, and our plan meaningfully addresses all of them.

- 1. Limited Opportunities** - In our plan, teachers do not have to stay in their last block classes, so they are more likely to be available for opportunities. Clubs will also have an approval process more similar to that of after school clubs, where they can become approved at any point in the year, so it will be much easier for students to have club meetings during this block.
- 2. Unproductive for Homework** - The reason for this limitation is that students that do not want to work distract those who do want to work. In our plan, students who do not want to work can leave, creating a much more productive environment for those who do want to stay.
- 3. Lack of Flexibility** - Our plan epitomizes flexibility. During the opportunity blocks, students can take a class, participate in clubs, stay at home, go to an out of school activity or go to school to work. This allows students to find the classes or activities that are most productive and interesting to them. During the current opportunity block, only doing homework or participating in a limited set of opportunities is available.
- 4. Unproductive Teacher Meetings** - Because teachers will not have to stay with their last block classes, the environment in which meetings take place will be much more productive.
- 5. Jobs/Internships** - Because students have the option of leaving for the afternoon opportunity, students with jobs or internships can choose to leave their afternoon opportunity empty, giving them more time for the valuable experience of gaining insight through real life experiences in the workplace.

Does this maintain the successes of the opportunity block?

- 1. Less Time Missed for Athletes** - Mandatory educational time still ends at 2:45. Because the afternoon opportunity would consist mostly of electives, athletes would not miss as much core class time, or they could choose to leave their afternoon opportunity period vacant. However, because there will be traffic departing at 2:45, it is possible that some athletes seeking to avoid after school traffic may have to leave slightly earlier.
- 2. More Opportunities for Clubs** - This plan expands upon this benefit of the opportunity block. Because there are classes in session during both opportunity periods, teams would not be allowed to practice during them, so athletes have two 45-minute periods every day in which they can participate in clubs if they choose to leave their opportunity periods open.

- 3. Easier Teacher Meetings** - This plan also expands this benefit. Because there are two opportunity periods, students have more opportunities to meet with teachers, and because they do not have to stay in their last block classes, these meetings will be more productive.

What's stopping kids from just coming to school from 9:20-2:45?

The short answer is nothing. However, the changes in the schedule make it so that the time per class is actually slightly greater than the 2017-18 schedule and far greater than the 2018-19 schedule², and because the number of required classes does not change, students will still have to spend just as much time in class. If a student chooses not to partake in either opportunity, they will have to cram all of their classes into the six block cycle without any opens. Also, the new bus schedule will remove the current disincentive to staying after, which is that the late bus comes long after anybody wants to stay. Alternatively, a proactive student now has the opportunity to take classes during the morning opportunity and the mandatory class time, participate in clubs during the opportunity period and play a sport after school.

Will teachers be required to stay from 8:30-3:35?

No. The required school day for teachers will be only 8:55-3:10, 30 minutes less than their current required time. Instead, teachers will have additional flex time. Flex time is a quota of the number of minutes that teachers must stay beyond the required time; it can be fulfilled before or after school. The flex time will be increased by 45 minutes. While this would appear to increase the time teachers must be at school, it is balanced by two things:

1. Teachers can leave at a time where there is no traffic. Currently, many teachers try to rush out of the school right at 3:15, leaving them stuck in the student traffic that can take as much as 20 minutes to clear. They face a similar situation in the morning. Now, they can avoid this.
2. Teachers have more flexibility. If a teacher needs to pick up their child at elementary school, which ends at 3:15, it will be much easier for them to arrive on time because they can leave five minutes earlier and they will not hit traffic; they can simply choose to fulfill all their flex time in the morning. Similarly, a teacher that wants to drop their children off at middle school, which starts at 8:00, or fulfill any other commitment before school, can arrive at 8:55, without hitting traffic, and choose to fulfill their flex time after school.

Teachers are required to spend fifteen more minutes per day in school, maximizing the time they spend with students, but they are also allowed to have more flexibility and leave when there is no traffic, maximizing the efficiency of teachers' time. While they will be at school longer, they will be at home just as long because they will not be wasting their valuable time sitting in traffic.

What's the point?

This plan is motivated fundamentally by the idea of personalization and maximization of productivity. Time is finite, and the source of nearly all of the conflict over the last two years surrounding school start time and the opportunity block has regarded the allocation of time. This plan enables each individual to optimize their schedule and personalize their learning to make the most of their time. For example:

- Athletes could leave open the afternoon opportunity period realizing they will have to miss it for games frequently

² 2017-18 School Year: each block is 58 minutes and meets 6/8 days. This is an average of 43.5 minutes per class per day.
2018-19 School Year: each block is 53 minutes and meets 6/8 days. This is an average of 39.75 minutes per class per day.
This plan: each block is 55 minutes and meets 5/6 days. This is an average of 45.8 minutes per class per day.

- Those who have a later circadian rhythm³ could choose to fill their mandatory class time schedule and take courses during the afternoon opportunity, leaving the morning opportunity open to get more sleep
- People who participate in many clubs could fill their mandatory class time and the morning opportunity period and leave the afternoon opportunity period and after school available for clubs

Most plans that provide this degree of flexibility also create a significant reduction in class time. We avoid this by reducing the number of classes in the mandatory period and allowing classes to meet during the opportunity period, resulting in slightly more average time per class per day and leaving the same total number of blocks available for classes.

³ According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, most teenagers have trouble falling asleep before 11:00 P.M. and are “best suited” to wake up at or after 8:00 A.M. Most busses depart well before 8:00 A.M., so students are still not getting as healthy sleep as possible. This would allow those who can fit it into their schedule to leave for school 50 minutes later, creating a far healthier sleep schedule.

Appendix A

Daily Block Schedule

Time\Day	A	B	C	D	E	F
8:30-9:15	<i>Morning Opportunity Period</i>					
9:20-10:15	1	3	2	1	3	2
10:20-11:15	2	1	3	2	1	3
11:20-12:45	3	2	1	4	6	5
12:50-1:45	4	6	5	5	4	6
1:50-2:45	5	4	6	6	5	4
2:50-3:35	<i>Afternoon Opportunity Period</i>					
Drop	6	5	4	3	2	1

Why This Cycle?

- **Reasonable Class Length** - a six block cycle creates 55 minute classes that meet 5/6 days, returning to the approximate time per class of the pre 2017-18 school year.
- **Accommodation of Part Time Teachers** - because the morning opportunity period and blocks 1, 2, and 3 are always in the morning and the afternoon opportunity and blocks 4, 5 and 6 are in the afternoon, part time teachers can easily work at the high school.
- **Alternating End of Day Classes** - to ensure that athletes that still have to leave before the opportunity period will not miss the same class repeatedly, blocks 4, 5 and 6 are each last 2/6 days.
- **Accommodation of Science Lab/Sem Skills** - any pair of morning blocks (1, 2, 3) or afternoon blocks (4, 5, 6) is adjacent three times per cycle, allowing ample opportunity for science lab and sem skills to be scheduled. Additionally, each block is either first or last twice per cycle, so science lab and sem skills could take place during the opportunity periods. In fact, this provides much greater flexibility for these extra blocks compared to our current system in which every science course must have its lab on the partnering block (4 → 3, 1 → 2, etc.).
- **Easier to Remember** - unlike our current block schedule, there is a pattern in this schedule that allows students to figure out the order based on the day. The morning blocks alternate in order cyclically: 1-2-3, 3-1-2, 2-1-3, as do the afternoon blocks: 4-5-6, 6-4-5, 5-6-4. The block that is dropped descends from 6 to 1 as the cycle progresses. This allows students to simply stack the afternoon block pattern onto the morning pattern and remove the dropped block to figure out their schedule.

Appendix B

Final Bus Schedule

Morning:

- **Wave A: 8:15**
- **Wave B: 9:05**

Afternoon:

- **Wave I: 2:55**
- **Wave II: 3:45**
- **Wave III: 4:45**