

# Trimester Study

**Research Question:** How can implementing trimesters for Art Class improve the environment for learning success?



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## Background

Over the last few years since Covid 19 shut down, school teachers have been battling an increase in behavioral problems in the classroom. Students seem to have trouble sitting for the full hour, and this is resulting in poor choices, such as disruptive behavior by getting up from their seats and engaging other students. These disruptions are even more on display in art classrooms. Students have more opportunities to be destructive with art supplies available at their fingertips. When they are no longer engaged in the classroom lessons, art class is seeing an increase in these poor behaviors such as: writing profanity on desks or other vandalism, throwing art supplies across the room, and extremely rambunctious agitation with one another, with an uptick in physical altercations in the classroom.

Students come to Art Class one time per day weekly for one full hour. This results in a lack of continuity and regularity for the students. It is not uncommon for students to forget their seating assignments and classroom rules and expectations. Also, if a student is absent, they then become two weeks behind on projects, which makes it even more difficult for them to catch up. Not only does an absence affect the classroom continuity of lessons in art class, but it makes it extremely difficult for art teachers to develop student rapport when students miss multiple days of class.

There has to be a better way to improve the classroom environment. Disruptive behaviors, excessive absences and difficulty with student/teacher rapport is inevitable, but perhaps the way that Art Class is scheduled is part of the problem. Could a new and different way of scheduling Art Class help make an environment that is more conducive for learning success? Could shorter classes help retain student engagement and diminish incidents of poor behavior? Could consecutive classes, as opposed to classes one time weekly, allow students to more effectively learn and be engaged in art projects? For now, the remedy seems to be solely put on the teachers to improve their classroom management.. We are asked to try many different interventions to improve student behavior. It seems to always come down to what the teacher does or doesn't do. But what if these attempts are all for naught ?

## Rationale

After the Covid-19 shutdown, schools reopened on a limited basis. Instead of classroom schedules returning back to those prior to Covid-19 lockdown, schools implemented an altogether different approach. The schedule's intent was to limit excessive exposure to multiple students and faculty throughout the day. What it did in turn is create a pilot for this new trimester schedule for specials classes, such as visual art and music. Students had art class for two days weekly, based on an A/B schedule. This continued for one-third of the school year calendar, which was approximately 50 days. Hence, the concept of trimesters for art class was born. When things returned back to the normal schedule, which has students in art class only one day weekly, but for the entire duration of the school year, I noticed that there was a difference in student engagement. Students had a harder time staying focused on the projects with such a long gap in between classes. Also, students' behavior suffered as well. They had to reorient themselves with classroom expectations and routines. I began to reflect on the differences I saw in the implementation of the trimester schedule upon the return from the Covid-19 lockdown. Could these differences be based on the differences that these contrasting schedules provide? Are there benefits to having trimester schedules for art class indefinitely? Was I missing something else in correlation with the personal observations I noticed?

## Literature review

There is no doubt that educational professionals have noticed more classroom difficulties since the Covid-19 pandemic. But, what is the correlation? Have attention spans decreased due to online learning and less social connection? Well...maybe not. According to the article in *Psychology Today*, the amount of time spent online has not affected our attention spans, but rather has highlighted something that was already in motion: our inability to engage with new ideas. (MORGAN, Nick. March 2021. *Psychology Today*). We are stressed-out and overloaded with information, which means retaining and engaging with information is the biggest challenge.

Ideal class times have now been shown to be somewhere less than 50 minutes. This allows students to be

engaged, while breaking up monotony(HART, Britton. August 2016. *What is the Real Ideal Class Length?*). After 30 minutes of processing information, students at any age level start to fall off and become increasingly bored and distracted (HART, Britton. August 2016). It does not necessarily equate, however, to: the shorter the class the better. According to the article by The Tenney School system, classes less than 30 minutes are not as effective at retention of learning material.

It seems that going to trimester schedules is becoming a very present and favorite choice for educators. According to the survey conducted by the NCES, out of 352 professional educators who responded, 79.83% of them responded that they 'liked' or 'extremely liked' the idea of moving to a trimester schedule(NCES. National Center for Education Statistics. Survey Results, 2022). The data has shown that more and more professional educators like the idea of having children for shorter classes, but with more continuity of consecutive classes to build on lesson plans.

Lastly, since the idea of moving to trimester schedules is so popular with professional educators, it stands to reason that it would boost teacher morale. This would especially be true with specials teachers, such as the art teachers. Administrative decisions that value the voices and opinions of the teachers within the district can benefit employer/employee relations. This is another immeasurable contribution of moving to trimester schedules.

### Study Design

In order to resolve my curiosity, I decided to interview a sample of teachers from the district. Most teachers are specifically visual art teachers; however, I also interviewed other specials teachers, as well as general education teachers. Each teacher was given the same set of questions during the interview process. Feedback was recorded, and the top six common (more than 1 similar) responses are listed in the Data Analysis section below. Conclusions and recommendations for this Case Study are based on these professional interview results and the literature that is reviewed and referenced in preparation of this project. All of the teachers interviewed had almost identical responses. Listed below are key statements made by the interviewees.

- Students' schedules would be more structured and routine, having one special per trimester. It would improve the teacher/student relationships and allow students to build on skills and scaffold learning by focusing on one discipline per trimester.
- The continuity of four consecutive days with a class time of 45 minutes a day for students would do really well to keep students engaged. They would see specials as a priority and of equal importance like their other core classes throughout the day, which would result in more buy in.
- Having 4- 45 minute art classes per week would give the general ed teacher a little more time for planning each day as compared to a larger amount of time on 1 day.
- Lessons would begin at the beginning of the week with instruction leaving the following days as work time. Students would be able to pick up where they left off the previous day on the current art project. This would limit the amount of repeated instruction and the teacher would be more available to students who need assistance.
- Having 3 grades at a time would give the teacher the time to focus on 3 projects at a time as compared to 9. The supply organization would be much more manageable.
- Having to manage 120 students as compared to 360 students would give the teacher a better chance to get to know the students and build rapport, remember their names and build relationships. This would be very beneficial for student teacher relationships and positively affect social/emotional learning.

## Recommendations

My first recommendation would be to gather a few TPS art teachers and form a focus group. This focus group would discuss the pros and cons of switching to trimesters. I would consider including a few general ed teachers as well to discuss how the schedule would affect them and give them an opportunity to contribute to the focus group's analysis. After due diligence was completed by the study group, I would then have the teachers work together to generate a schedule. As a starting point for generating a schedule, below would be my initial recommendation example:

\*Note, this example would change at each trimester to accommodate the other grade levels.

Times	9:15-10:00	10:10-10:55	11:05-11:50	11:50-12:50	1:10-1:55	2:05-2:50
Monday	6th Lewandowski 9:15-10:00	7th Johnson 10:10-10:55	8th Griffin 11:05-11:50	Lunch (12:30-1:00)	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group A 1:10-1:55	Planning
Tuesday	6th Lewandowski 9:15-10:00	7th Johnson 10:10-10:55	8th Griffin 11:05-11:50	Lunch (12:30-1:00)	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group A 1:10-1:55	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group B 2:05-2:40
Wednesday	6th Lewandowski 9:15-10:00	planning	8th Griffin 11:05-11:50	Lunch (12:30-1:00)	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group A 1:10-1:55	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group B 2:05-2:40
Thursday	6th Lewandowski 9:15-10:00	7th Johnson 10:10-10:55	Lunch	Planning	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group A 1:10-1:55	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group B 2:05-2:40
Friday	Planning	7th Johnson 10:10-10:55	8th Griffin 11:05-11:50	Lunch (12:30-1:00)	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group A 1:10-1:55	8th Buckingham/ CCSE Neitzke Group B 2:05-2:40

The trimester schedule allows for other improvements to be made. Starting art class at 9:15 compared to the current 9:00 schedule gives homeroom students and teachers a more manageable schedule for the following:

- Hearing morning announcements
- Taking lunch count
- Getting students settled in with putting coats and bookbags away
- Turning in homework assignments
- And for those late arrivers to get settled in

The same situation for the end of the day. Ending art at 2:50 gives the students and teachers time to get back to their rooms. This allows the following:

- Students have time to pack up their belongings.
- Teachers and students shut down the room for the day.
- Students and teachers will not have to be rushed listening for buses to be called.
- If students have any other needs to take care of (call about ride home, picking up phone from office, ect.) This can be done during this time.

The above recommendations are in no way a “cure-all” for creating a successful learning environment and ensuring learning success. However, as the culture changes, so should the systems and methodologies of our educational systems. What worked twenty years ago simply doesn’t anymore. We live in a world that has so much information at our fingertips, that our ability to manage and consume too many things at once has decreased. Since student capacities are different, our educational approaches should be different too. With trimester schedules in place, students have the best chance for a learning environment where they can succeed and flourish.

## REFERENCES

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