



September 3, 2019

Dear SHS Families,

As we make final preparations for our first day of school, I wanted to take a moment to write with some information and perspectives regarding our new schedule. As I reflected with our faculty and staff on our opening day last week, there is perhaps no greater change that a high school can make than to change its master schedule. As I sit here wallowing in my own anxiety about what tomorrow may bring, I am cognizant of the fact that many of our students are feeling the same exact way, so I hope this letter can alleviate some of those concerns.

As you know, a team of teachers and administrators has been researching and designing our new schedule for the past several years, all with the intention of creating longer blocks of time for students and teachers to focus on quality instruction. Yet, I know full-well, and we heard it last year in focus groups with students and parents, that a change like this is not universally welcomed. Comments like “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” and “why are you doing this - no one at the high school wants this” resonated with me, so I thought I would remind everyone of what we know are the positive outcomes that will come from this schedule change. Also, as I write this letter and confront my own anxieties, I know that there will be bumps in the road, challenges we will face, and changes that might have to be made. I also know, and have the utmost confidence in the fact, that with our amazing students and staff, along with the tremendous support of our families, we will work together to make this change as seamless as possible.

Here are a few of the many reasons we are moving to a new schedule and the inherent benefits which we feel, and which our research overwhelmingly supports, will be positive for our school:

- A schedule with fewer class periods and fewer transitions slows down the pace of the day for both students and staff. There is more time in classrooms for teachers to go into more depth, employ student-centered strategies, provide support for students who might need additional time, and allow students to get feedback on their learning in the moment, rather than waiting to go home and practice, perhaps incorrectly. The longer blocks of time will foster classroom instruction in which students are engaged in rigorous learning to an even greater extent than our previous schedule would allow given the time constraints of 40-minute classes.
- Not meeting all of your classes on a given day provides for greater flexibility in the way students manage their time. While this can also present a challenge for some, the greater good here is that we are preparing students for life after high school where time management is an essential skill. In addition, the fewer classes reduces the quantity of work that a student must complete each night, allowing them to spread assignments out and according to their own available time.
- The rotating nature of the classes means that students will no longer have the same class at the same exact time for 180 days straight. Putting it another way, if my most challenging subject is, let’s say, Social Studies, and that class meets first period every day, that would be a challenge for me first thing in the morning. In the new schedule, that class would rotate among the first three periods, allowing me to experience this challenging class at a variety of times when my focus and attention might change. While this rotating pattern may prove challenging to learn at first, we are confident that students will get the hang of it within the first few days of school.
- Lastly, the notion of a Community Lunch is something our taskforce reacted incredibly favorably towards during our research phase. The idea that all students are free at the same exact time does exactly what its name suggests – it fosters a sense of community. Students are provided the freedom to choose how they spend

the time, where they go for the period, and with whom they spend the time with. We will have the Lower Gym open for students to participate in activities, as well as the Cafeteria, Commons, Library, Writing Center, Academic Support Center, College and Career Center and the Counseling Center. Once clubs are up and running, we imagine that some clubs might choose to meet during Community Lunch as well, rather than compete with other after-school activities. Freshman Peer Mentoring groups will also meet once a cycle during Community Lunch. *Please see the attached documents that will help guide students regarding the expectations for how and where they spend their time, how to order lunch, and what is being served each day in the Cafeteria and Commons. .*

Again, shifting an entire school community to a new schedule will not come without its challenges and we may need to make tweaks along the way. What I would ask of everyone, however, is that we allow some time to go by before jumping to any conclusions. This is new way of being for all of us and, as a school, we will do our part to make it work for all students. If you would like to provide feedback along the way, please feel free to email suggestions, questions, or issues to schedulefeedbackSHS@somersschools.org. A member of our administrative team will be sure to get back to inquiries in a timely fashion.

We are incredibly excited to welcome our students back for what we know will be a terrific school year and to welcome our newest students, the members of the Class of 2023, to the high school. For those students who are nervous about starting school tomorrow, please let them know that they are not alone and that all will be alright. We have a ton of support for students at the high school and we all share a vested interest in helping each of our students find success!

With kind regards,



Mark E. Bayer
Principal

encl: *“Expectations for Community Lunch”*
 “Where’s Lunch – New Schedule”
 “How to Order”