ACPS Eight-Period Hybrid Schedule Design
March Update: March 3, 2010

Department of Instruction

It is our vision that all learners believe in their power to embrace learning, to excel, and to own their future. For all of us to fulfill this vision, we must endeavor to work together. While the change in our high school academic schedules was a centralized decision made out of exigency, the process for creating this change in its working form will be dependent on the input and ownership of our school community. With the rapid transition to using an 8-Period Hybrid schedule at all ACPS High Schools, we realize the need to update stakeholders as we develop a division-wide approach along with site-based adaptations.

Since the School Board voted to move the division in this direction on February 11, 2010, the Assistant Superintendent for Student Learning and the Director of Secondary of Education, Billy Haun and Matt Haas, have met with student leadership teams at each high school to discuss this transition along with the budget issues that led to it. We have also held forums with parents at all three comprehensive high schools. This is in addition to our attendance at school staff meetings as requested. In addition Dr. Haas held a forum on the 8-Period Hybrid schedule with the County Student Council and the Parent Council to address questions about it, and Mr. Haun held a similar forum with questions and answers for the Albemarle County Teacher Advisory.

We know that our large-group forums are only the beginning of the development and communication process, and we recognize that communication will be the greatest challenge in this process. Further, staff will need learning opportunities to not only adjust master schedules and academic schedules but opportunities to change their curricula scope and sequence to adapt to the new schedule as appropriate.

Each school has created a design team to make plans for the school’s new academic and master schedule. Meetings among these teams have been ongoing since mid-February. Recently a division-wide design team that includes leaders from each school has convened. This team includes the following representation from each school. Principals made these selections:

Scheduling Administrator
School Counselor
Two Teachers
One student

We also have a parent from parent council on the team as well as representation from our DART department so that decisions we make flow with the student database development that is ongoing.

We had our first meeting on Monday, March 3, to get organized. We will continue to meet according to the following schedule.

2. Bi-weekly for the fall of 2010.
3. Tri-weekly in the spring of 2011.
This is an all-volunteer group. The first meeting went very well. We identified the following goals:

1. Design the decision-making process.
2. Monitor decisions so that they are made in a timely manner and with as much consistency across the schools as possible where we need it.
3. Contribute to the decision-making process at the division level and communicate decisions.
4. Help monitor and troubleshoot implementation.
5. Ensure professional development and growth for all through this process.
6. Develop goals for the 8-Period Hybrid other than cost savings.
7. Establish an evaluation plan and participate in ongoing evaluation / troubleshooting.

To facilitate communication within the team and with school based teams, Tony Borash has developed an online handbook to contain the questions, ideas, decisions, and designs that the group creates. This will help schools avoid solving the same problems in different places while creating consistency where we need it.

We will need to address the following items immediately:

1. Identifying the duration / format for all courses offered at the high schools along with credit value. We are working on scheduling a day for content experts from each school to work together to recommend courses to offer outside the semester format and to make other recommendations.

2. Design course sequences so that long term implications of course duration decisions can be seen in advance and in light of students’ learning needs and graduation requirements.

3. Each school will create an academic schedule to accommodate the 8-Period Hybrid while including the schedule features that students and staff recognize as supporting students in their learning.

In terms of staff development, we are working on the following items to give teachers and administrators learning and growth opportunities while engaged with this change.

1. We are sponsoring field trips for school staff to other schools that have successfully created 4 x 4 and hybrid schedules. These staff members are learning and establishing contacts with other professionals who are well-versed with these scheduling models.

2. We are working with the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (VASCD) to make contact with a scheduling consultant to work with the division and school based design teams as they make structural decisions. We may also host a training session over several days on designing master schedules with an 8-Period Hybrid focus.

3. We are in the process of contacting UVA to see about offering a course on curriculum development and adaptation based on teaching for essential skills and understandings. If feasible, this course would be offered for free to teachers while giving them an opportunity to earn credit and work on their own curricula during the summer and fall. The “text” would be the Framework for Quality Learning (FQL), and much of their work and assessment would involve creating and uploading units to School Net for use by teachers throughout the division.

4. We plan to build a pool of “experts” from the contacts made through field trips. We plan to offer some forums in the spring for staff to attend and ask operational and instructional questions of these experts so that they can have “nuts and bolts” answers to their critical questions.
While the 8-Period Hybrid is a budgetary decision, it will be very important to establish goals for this change beyond cost savings. Goals that are in line with the Division Strategic Goals will be developed by the county design team. Two strategic goals that immediately come to focus are “Eliminate the Achievement Gap” and “Prepare all students to succeed as members of a global community and in a global economy.”

On a final note, as we are in the midst of the scheduling process, it is important for all of us to remember that while we always have a schedule in mind, the exact details of course placements are not known to school administration or staff until mid-summer. This is the case year in and year out. While there is more uncertainty with a shift in academic schedules, the schedule is always uncertain because it should be driven by student choice in the registration process.

We recommend that we all refer parents and staff to the paper copy of the Albemarle County Guide to High School Credit Courses their child received in January. It has a process timeline in it on page one that we developed well before we transitioned to the 8-Period Hybrid Schedule. Nothing in the timeline has been changed. It has been delayed due to school cancellations for inclement weather.

According to the timeline, students have registered, and now they are having follow-up meetings with counselors to firm up their choices. This is right on schedule thanks to the hard work of our counselors, school staff, and DART.

Also according to the timeline, copies of course selections will be sent home in May (two months from now). This paperwork, though, still does not guarantee the placement of a class anywhere in the academic schedule. It simply confirms choices.

Finally, the timeline states that courses will be moved around in the schedule as late as June (three months from now) to maintain balance. So, again, there is no guarantee of the placement of a course in the schedule until final schedules are mailed out in very late July or early August.

This timeline is the same, year in and year out. It has not changed because we are moving to a new schedule.

We have provided 8th grade counselors with the following statement to communicate with parents and students about registration for courses. As you read it, please see how it would apply to any year of scheduling with some minor changes.

It has been determined that we will be moving to an 8-Period Hybrid schedule during the 2010-2011 school year. Therefore, middle school counselors should register their 8th graders for a total of 8 courses. These students should plan to pick an additional elective for their 9th grade year. We do still need for students to continue to pick three alternate electives. We anticipate that we will be adding new courses to the 2010-2011 Guide to High School Credit Courses to provide additional elective options for our students. Most of these added electives will likely be foundational courses that will provide extra support to students who we anticipate might struggle in SOL courses. We do not yet know what these courses are, but will let you know as soon as any of them are approved.

Please look for more updates in the future. As decisions are made, we will continue to communicate with all of our stakeholder groups so that we can put our combined efforts into making this new schedule work to the benefit of our students and schools.