

## *Various Ways to Schedule Advanced Placement (AP) Courses in Schools with the 4/4 (Accelerated) Block Schedule*

The following questions need to be answered before schools can BEST schedule AP courses in the 4/4, or what some educators call the accelerated block schedule:

1. How many AP courses are being offered in the school? If the school is offering fewer than four AP courses, greater flexibility is possible relative to the amount of time that can be provided each course? The nature of the four courses also can be an issue; for example, more time might be given to laboratory courses such as AP biology, chemistry and physics than to AP English or AP psychology.
2. How many AP courses typically would the most advanced students in the school complete? If the school offers ten or more courses and some students complete nine or ten, then obviously, little or no additional time or credits can be given to any of the AP courses.
3. When do the Fall and Spring semesters end? If the Fall semester ends before the winter holidays, some options are possible that are not as easily implemented than if the Fall term ends in January. Also, the best plan for scheduling AP courses is different if the Spring semester ends in late May or if it runs to June 15-20. In some states, the end of the school year depends on the number of school closings experienced, typically during the winter months because of weather, which primarily affects when the Spring semester ends.
4. Do some AP teachers require one or more preliminary courses before students are permitted to enroll in their AP class. For example, recently I worked in a school where the AP chemistry teacher required students to complete two chemistry courses, which he taught, before they could enroll in his AP class, and then he determined who was eligible for the AP class. Not surprisingly, at the time he had only eight students in the AP chemistry class and he was questioning whether two of those students should remain.
5. Is the school trying to increase enrollments in AP courses? Is having both Tier I students (those students teachers typically believe should be in AP classes) and Tier II students (those students who are doing well in school but need to be “boosted and supported” if they are to be successful in AP classes) acceptable to

the AP teachers and the traditional AP community? If such arrangements are to be encouraged, teachers must be willing to deal with grading issues or the Tier II students often lose by receiving lower grades and a lower GPA which affects scholarship money they might receive; this issue particularly is a concern in states that offer scholarship money, often from lottery funds, if students have a specified GPA and go to college within the state.

### **SCHEDULING SUGGESTIONS FOR AP COURSES IN SCHOOLS WITH THE 4/4, SEMESTER/SEMESTER BASIC SCHOOL-WIDE SCHEDULE**

1. If the school offers four or fewer AP classes, the AP classes might be scheduled for double credits (two Carnegie units) and meet for a full block of time both semesters. This plan can be especially advantageous if the school is trying to encourage Tier II students to take AP classes. By doubling the number of credits and the amount of time for AP classes, teachers and students have more time to re-work papers, re-do tests and to engage in in-depth discussions and Socratic seminars. For Tier II students the additional time keeps the course from becoming a “speed drill”, and support can be provided by the teacher who is doing the initial instruction. This particular plan is favored for heavy laboratory courses such as AP biology, chemistry and physics.
2. If the school offers five or more AP courses, the AP classes might be scheduled in an alternating-day (A/B) block of time within the 4/4 block schedule. With this model, Tier I students might take, for example, an AP English class on A days throughout the year and AP government on B days. Tier II students might be members of the AP English class on A days and then attend an AP seminar on B days, at least during the first semester.
3. Depending on the number of AP classes offered in a school, if students can enroll in AP classes in both Grades 11 and 12, students can complete the regular content of the AP classes during a full block of time during the Fall semester and then enroll in what we term a “trailer course” during the Spring semester. A trailer course in the 4/4 block schedule usually meets at least for the first nine weeks during the spring semester, typically on an A/B basis. Depending on when the Spring semester begins and ends and how those timings coincide with the AP testing schedule, the trailer course could run for either nine or eighteen weeks of the Spring semester. An example of this schedule is as follows: a student might complete AP English and AP Government during Blocks 1 and 2 during the Fall semester, then enroll in an extension of the AP English and AP Government courses during Block 2 of the Spring semester. This extension or “trailer” course of the two classes could be offered on an A/B basis or on a single period basis. If the trailer course runs for nine weeks and ends close to when the students

complete their AP tests, students could remain with the same teachers and enroll in a combined semester course for the final nine weeks. If the Spring semester ends only a few weeks after AP testing, the trailer course for the two AP courses could continue for the full Spring semester. In this case the student would receive 2.0 credits for each of the AP courses. If the trailer course runs only for nine weeks, the student receives 1.5 credits for each AP course and .5 credit for each of the courses following the trailer course.

4. If only two to four AP courses are offered, students might complete the basic content of the AP courses during the Fall semester of Grades 11 and 12 and then enroll in an AP seminar during the Spring semester when they are tested. The primary purpose of this seminar is to review and to enhance, based on past knowledge of the tests, the most difficult or troublesome parts of the course content. This seminar is different than the one designed for Tier II students. With this seminar format, all students who have completed one or more AP courses during the Fall semester, along with their AP teachers, enroll in only one AP seminar for one full blocked semester to review two to four AP course materials for which they plan to be tested. This plan probably is not best for schools trying to get more students, such as Tier II students, to complete AP courses.

An adaptation of this plan is when high schools have a sufficient number of minutes in the school day to schedule at least four 80-minute blocks of time, a lunch period and a 30- 40- minute single period that meets daily, AP classes can be continued in a modified way during this single period. For non-AP students this period can be used for both tutorials and enrichments for selected students; various student activities, such as clubs and pep rallies, also can be scheduled, and during the Spring semester students who completed their AP courses during the Fall semester can be scheduled with their AP teachers for extended review and discussion.

5. Schedule AP courses that meet in the 4/4 block for one and one-half semesters or 27 weeks and then include a semester course at the end of the AP class which is determined by and taught by the same teacher. This plan is good for those schools whose spring schedules typically have to complete AP testing several weeks before the end of school. AP teachers tell us they like this schedule because it keeps students in the AP content closer to the testing time, and traditionally it was difficult to get students to take some of their work seriously after AP testing dates. By adding a semester course with a different title, course number, etc., to the AP class, students remain more motivated. An example might be that an AP English teacher completes the AP course content in late April or early May, briefly reviews for the AP test, and then moves the students into a one semester hour course, for example, on short story writing or analyzing films and tapes. An AP history teacher teaching in a small town might complete

the AP course with a one semester hour class by having the students write a history of the community during WW II or the Vietnam era, possibly after some field trips, such as visiting the local cemetery and identifying families who had lost relatives during one of those wars.

6. In some courses, the AP class can be built from what might be termed a filter class. For example, the school might offer several sections of general chemistry during the Fall semester. From all of the general sections of chemistry, one or two AP chemistry classes might be formed which would be taught during the Spring semester of the 4/4 schedule. By following this format, all AP students have been in chemistry for a full block both semesters and the basic chemistry class serves as a filter for those students who want to move into the AP content during the Spring semester. Again, this plan is a good plan depending on when the spring semester ends and how that time line coincides with AP testing dates.
7. If the blocks of time in the 4/4 schedule are 90 minutes, AP courses could be scheduled by identifying one or two blocks for AP courses and then schedule two single periods just for the AP courses. Some call this plan offering two “skinnies” within selected blocks. This plan, like the A/B plan discussed in (2), can create some scheduling problems, especially in large schools, primarily because any time we create a “skinny” for a course that runs all year, another “skinny” has to be placed with the selected or preferred “skinny” and some courses just are not good matches, plus the scheduling is most difficult. For example, in the past some schools have tried to match courses such as physical education, band or computer classes with AP “skinnies”. It can be done, but we feel physical education and band classes should have longer blocks of time to justify the amount of time it takes to prepare and end those classes. For example, in PE typically some time has to be spent dressing, undressing, showering, etc. whether the class meets for 45 minutes or 90 minutes. Generally, we have found that it is easier to schedule on an A/B basis rather than trying to schedule two “skinnies” within a block of time.
8. In scheduling AP classes in the 4/4 block, one might consider mixing all of the above plans for various courses. For example, heavy laboratory courses might be scheduled in a block that runs all year (180 days); some AP classes might be scheduled by using the filtering idea described in (6) above; AP English and Government classes, for example, could be scheduled as shown in (5) above, and possibly schedule some AP classes for both Tier I and Tier II students as described in (2) above. Which plan to use often depends on answers to the questions listed on page one.

Like many union contracts, seemingly AP testing dates have been developed assuming that high schools are rather uniformly scheduled with year-long courses; at least, in the past that most likely was with six to ten single periods that ran for the

full year. Today we know that in many schools scheduled with single period, year-long courses a large number of struggling students spend much of their time in core classes they know they are going to fail as early as October of the school year. Schools have had to adapt schedules based on what we have learned about better use of the time variable and the wide range of student differences entering high school. Accountability factors in place in many states also have made this change imperative.

If testing companies continue to refuse to adjust testing dates based on changing school schedules, we have little choice but to adapt the 4/4 block schedule to accommodate AP classes. Regardless of the plans used above to schedule AP classes, we have found that in hundreds of schools AP classes have been offered successfully in the 4/4 block. Quite often the 4/4 schools end up enrolling more students in AP classes, especially if the school has moved from a six- or seven-, single period schedule to the 4/4, as a result of more slots being opened for students to take both AP classes and electives in the 4/4 block schedule.

Note: For additional information on the 4/4 semester schedule, see: Canady, Robert Lynn and Michael D. Rettig, Block Scheduling: A Catalyst for Change in High Schools, Larchmont, NY: Eye On Education, pp. 67-114. ISBN 1-883001-14-5 (914) 833 0551 FAX (914) 833 0761 For discussion of AP classes scheduled in the 4/4, see pp. 100-101.