The Wildcat Cles Durant High School The Wildcat Cles January 25, 2024

Principal finalizes new schedule change

By Kylee Hahn

Durant High School will switch from blocks to periods starting next school year, according to Principal Joel Diederichs, who explained the new change as a positive step for Durant.

"I think that actually students will enjoy it more because you'll actually break up your day more instead of staying for an hour and a half," said Mr. Diederichs.

The high school has been on a block schedule since 2012. It has four 80-minute blocks each day with a 17-minute seminar and a 40-minute skinny at the end of the day. Students have each class every other day, except skinny which meets daily.

Under the new eight-period schedule, classes will be shorter and meet every day.

The period schedule will eliminate seminar, except for Wednesdays, which right now is the one day Durant High School students don't have seminar. The skinny slot will also be removed.

However, Mr. Diederichs said seniors will still be offered open blocks.

"What we're looking at right now is first or second has a chance to have an open block and seventh and eighth," he said.

Mr Diederichs has not finished a final schedule for next year but indicated that Life Skills will not be offered to seniors anymore because the state of Iowa no longer requires it.

He stated that its material will be incorporated into other courses like Family and Consumer Sciences.

Mr. Diederichs said that one of the main reasons the district made this change was due to teenagers' shorter attention spans.

"The average attention span right now for teenagers, and I'd say even up into adults, is 28 minutes to 42 minutes," said Mr. Diederichs.

"It makes it very tough to stay focused for that long."

Mr. Diederichs believes students who oppose the switch haven't given this

change a fair chance.

"People are afraid of a little bit different," he said.

At a school board meeting January 8, two high school students spoke out against the change.

A freshman, Rebekah Lerma, presented remarks on behalf of a friend, sophomore Alivia Barnard, who could not attend the meeting.

A sophomore, Baie Hart, presented her own speech, and Lerma also presented a petition opposing the change that had around 60 student signatures.

Barnard believes this change will make high school a lot more stressful.

"I also think that kids are going to have a hard time dealing with such a drastic change," she said.

"The principal says we'll adapt, but I don't think there's really a need for the change."

Junior Wyatt Richards said he has a "negative" opinion on the switch and be-

lieves it will make school boring.

"I think that having block scheduling makes each day more eventful and less monotonous because of being able to have different classes for A days and B days respectively and with period scheduling having the same eight classes each day seems boring," said Richards.

On the other hand, Richards said the period schedule may help kids with ADHD focus better with the shortened classes.

In her speech to the school board, Hart said that shortening class time isn't the way to deal with teenagers with shorter attention spans.

"I've heard claims that this will help with attention spans due to our generation spending time on their phones, but the cure to fixing attention span is to try and make it longer, not to cradle it and shorten it more," said Hart.

The Durant school board had no immediate response to the students' presentations.

Decrease in local ACT scores due to several factors

By Royce Richman

For the fourth year in a row, Durant juniors will be taking the American College Testing (ACT) free of charge this spring with funding provided by the Durant school district

However, as the number of Durant students taking the test grew, the average composite score dropped, as might be expected.

Durant began offering free ACT tests in 2021, and 52 students from the Class of 2022 took the test that year, according to a report from the Iowa Department of Education. The year before, when students had to pay for the test themselves, only 30 students from the Class of 2021 took the test.

The Class of 2021 had a composite score of 20.5; however, the composite score of the Class of 2022 dropped to 18. The composite score for the Class of 2023 slipped

even further to 17.8 when 44 students took it free of charge, the state report indicated.

But scores finally rebounded last year to 18.6 for the Class of 2024, according to local records. Durant also has a test for the sophomores called the PreACT. This test is sort of a practice for the real ACT that students will take the following year. According to Mrs. Maria Brown, Durant's director of instruction and innovation, almost 70 percent of students improved their scores by 1 to 6 points last school year from the PreACT to the ACT.

The Durant scores seem to mirror a nationwide trend that might be COVID-related in part.

ACT scores across the United States have been steadily declining for the past six years, and the Class of 2022 and 2023 recorded composite scores below 20 for the first time in more than 30 years, according to

the ACT, which has corporate offices in Iowa City

The ACT sets benchmarks for students to meet that predicts how they might do in college.

The benchmarks are 18 in English, 22 in Math, 22 in Reading, and 23 in Science. If students meet these benchmarks, ACT estimates that they will have a 50 percent chance of getting a B or better in their college classes and 75 percent chance of getting a C or better.

According to the ACT, the graduating class of 2023 nationwide was in its first year of high school when COVID-19 hit the United States, a news release stated.

"The proportion of 'COVID cohort' seniors meeting none of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks reached historic highs in 2023. Twenty-one percent of students met all four benchmarks, while 43% met none of these benchmarks," the release stated.

Locally, 41 percent of Durant's Class of 2023 met the English benchmark, 18 percent met the math benchmark, 36 percent met the reading benchmark, and 20 percent met the science benchmark, according to the state report. Only 7 percent of students met all four benchmarks.

To take dual-credit classes at Durant High School, some students take the ACT test as early as their freshman year in high school, another possible reason for lower scores

Sophomore John Hallberg said that the low scores could also be related to whether students have to pay to take the test. The cost to take the test without a writing portion is \$68.

"It's a motivation factor that matters for the students, I feel," said Hallberg.

2 Durant graduates inspired to pursue environmental careers

By Gavin Broussard and Garrett Pearlman

Climate change has sparked two Durant graduates, Tanner Sorgenfrey and Luke Abels, to pursue careers related to the environment.

Sorgenfrey, class of 2019, recently graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in environmental planning and policy along with an emphasis on sustainability.

According to Sorgenfrey, sustainability is the act of responsibly interacting with our shared planet, whether it be the use of natural resources or maintaining clean air and water for the preservation of society, the environment, and economic development for generations.

Abels, a 2021 graduate, is currently enrolled at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) and chose to major in both computer science and environmental science.

Sorgenfrey's desired major wasn't always environmental planning and policy. He originally pursued a major in engineering until one college class changed his career path

"I still felt like my trajectory [in engineering] wouldn't make an impact," said Sorgenfrey. "I felt curious in an Intro to Sustainability gen-ed and found the ma-

jor of environmental policy and planning. I liked the broad focus on our shared planet and the many directions for employment, so I wouldn't feel stuck in a box."

Sorgenfrey feels that some of his interest in the environment comes from issues surrounding climate change.

"I just knew there were a lot of ways I could shape my future with what I studied," said Sorgenfrey. "But I felt that since our society is destined to feel the impacts of climate change, no other area of study was safe without addressing the issue."

Sorgenfrey did some interesting research at the University of Iowa involving environmental studies. He went to the prairie at the Ashton Cross Country Course and used a device that clamped on a leaf and measured its characteristics.

"It clamped on a leaf where we were able to experiment with different factors such as light exposure, humidity, oxygen/carbon dioxide, and temperature," said Sorgenfrey. "We worked in groups manipulating the environment of the leaf to see the impacts on the rate of oxygen production."

Sorgenfrey plans to use his degree in environmental planning and policy to go into public service and city planning. He is currently serving an internship with the city of Iowa City.

"My degree prepared me for a variety of jobs such as environmental compliance, non-profit work, government work, or GIS (Geographic Information Systems)," said Sorgenfrey. "I am currently building a snowplow tracker trying to make an informative destination for the public to see the progress of the street crews. I plan to continue my work in the public sector, and I hope to get a job as a city planner."

Sorgenfrey enjoyed a variety of classes at Iowa, including energy policy, urban planning, environmental economics, and anthropology.

"I also enjoyed a class called U.S. energy policy in the global context, where I gained a vast amount of knowledge about the many different participants in fossil fuels and electricity, production and distribution and the ways different levels and divisions of government oversee it domestically," he said.

"In many classes, the idea [is] that the environment provides for society in many ways, but in order to be sustainable, it must be equally beneficial to humanity, the economy, and the environment."

Luke Abels, son of middle school social studies teacher Mr. Mark Abels, said



Photo contributed by Tanner SorgenfreyDurant graduate Tanner Sorgenfrey
completes work on a nature trail.

his career path was spurred by Internet videos.

"I grew up watching people talking about science and technology on YouTube, and it greatly helped me find my passion for them," he said.

"However, that wasn't the only factor. Durant's incredible teachers were also **See ENVIRONMENT, page 2**