School Board Executive Summary
Response to Research on Junior High Schedule
September 16, 2010 School Board Meeting

Background
The Hopkins School Board requested information from Dr. Michael Rettig regarding any research on the alternating quarter system that was approved for the junior high schools’ schedule.

Purpose
This report provides Dr. Rettig’s response to the question on the alternating quarter system.

Recommendation
For Information Only

Presenter(s)/Contact(s)
Dr. John Schultz, Superintendent
Dr. Nik Lightfoot, Assistant Superintendent
Dr. Diane Schimelpfenig, Director of Teaching and Learning

Overview
As part of our research in school scheduling, we consulted School Scheduling Associates. School Scheduling Associates, LLC is dedicated to the proposition that time is a valuable resource and that school scheduling is far more important than the simple mechanical assignment of students to teachers, spaces, and time periods. We aim to harness the power of the school schedule to address problems and facilitate the successful implementation of effective instructional practices. (http://www.schoolschedulingassociates.com.)

Dr. Michael D. Rettig is the founder of School Scheduling Associates, LLC. He spent 15 years as a professor in the College of Education and Director of
the Center for School Leadership at James Madison University (JMU), Harrisonburg, VA. He retired from JMU as Professor Emeritus in June 2006 to work full-time with schools across the country. In addition to his work in higher education, he taught public school in Syracuse, NY for 10 years and served as a school principal in Virginia for six years.

Dr. Rettig has served as a consultant on school scheduling issues in 41 states with over 750 school districts nationally and internationally. He also has conducted hundreds of workshops and has authored or co-authored numerous articles and books on school scheduling and related topics.

In conversations with Dr. Rettig last fall, as we explored his scheduling expertise, he clearly highlights the benefits of block scheduling. Dr. Rettig’s research was not specific to the alternating quarter block scheduling.

The following inquiry was sent to Dr. Rettig on June 10, 2010:
Thank you for the use of your information and presentation. It was very helpful to us in our committee work and also to our Board as it made its decision. One question arose at the Board table related to the junior high schedule we adopted: Do you know if there is any specific research or information related to other districts who have adopted a four block alternating quarter model? In essence, we went with a 4x4 schedule and have our core classes alternating quarters rather than days. This way we reduced student load for our teachers during a marking term.

We did a peripheral search for data, but were unable to find any research or information regarding this type of schedule. Do you by chance know of any source we might pursue to learn further information about any items of which we should be aware—the Board asked me to inquire with you further. Thank you in advance for any information you might be able to provide or if you have any knowledge of where to redirect our inquiry. We are greatly appreciative of any insight or information you might offer.
**Dr. Rettig’s Response:**
I know of no one else who has adopted that model. As you said it most closely resembles a 4X4, but with a quarter each semester of each class. Some schools in Canada do a 2X2X2X2 model in which students take 2 courses each quarter that each meet for a double block. We have a private school in VA in which students take only one course every seven weeks. Read about the "One Course Plan" at Fork Union Military Academy (http://www.forkunion.com).

**Committee’s Management of the Research for the Alternating Quarter Schedule**
Although the research does not show that any particular scheduling option has a more positive impact on student achievement than others, the committee found Rettig’s overall research supportive of block scheduling for students. We believe the alternating quarter block schedule provides us with all of the benefits of block scheduling supported in Rettig’s research, along with:

- enhanced choice for students and families
- the ability for junior high students to focus on 4 courses rather than 8 each quarter.
- lower student load for teachers (a move from approximately 180 students a marking term to 90 students a marking term)
- a stronger ability to differentiate because of the lower student loads,
- a stronger ability to match the same teacher with the same group of students (over a trimester model) in alternating quarters
- enhanced ability for students to receive individual attention due to the lower student load,

**Primary Issues to Consider**
Research on the 4 x 4 Model

**Supporting Documents**
None