

More Answers to Questions

Question: Why have parents not received more communication about this [balanced day schedule]?

Parents were sent a letter in early April from the Director of Education, Dr Dusty Papke. These letters were sent home with all elementary school students in the Halton District School Board.

Principals and school councils have been in discussions regarding the implementation of the timetable for their schools. The Board has posted Balanced Day information on its website at www.hdsb.ca with a link from the main page. All reports and Frequently Asked Questions are posted there.

Question: Can parents have an impact on the decision to implement the Balanced Day timetable?

The Board will continue to monitor and seek feedback as part of the implementation and review process. Parents are encouraged to share their concerns with school councils and school administrators.

Question: If this is based on funding, are there any other options?

The decision to implement the balanced day timetable is not based on funding.

Question: How can students get home for lunch in 50 minutes?

Feedback from pilot schools has not indicated that 50 minutes is insufficient time for lunch. A number of schools within the board have a 50 minute lunch with the current traditional school timetable.

Question: The Balanced Day timetable provides less extra curricular time for sport/music at lunch (within 50 minutes).

The balanced day timetable actually enhances the number of times available each week for co-instructional activities and provides children with more choice. Children can potentially have more choices since there will be 2 periods each day for extracurricular activities (morning nutrition break and afternoon nutrition break).

Question: Nutritional snacks are usually pre-packaged food which are unhealthy – aren't you worried about increasing obesity?

Schools will be consulting with Halton Region Health Unit staff and other school boards that have explored the nutritional component of the timetable. Parents will be provided with information to help families make good decisions about packing healthy snacks.

Question: Where is the data supporting the benefits to the children?

There is no data to support either the traditional school day organization (which varies from school to school) or the Balanced Day timetable.

Question: Children do their best learning in the morning – the Balanced Day timetable removes a large block of morning time. How is this beneficial to children?

Although researchers have discovered that time of the day does play a significant role in student achievement, not all students learn best at one particular time of day.

Preferred Learning Time:

Students who are taught at times that match their learning style, score significantly higher on lesson-based assessments. The work of Rita Dunn (1985, 1990) on elementary students' preferred learning times and Roger John Callan (1998) on high school students' preferred learning times indicate that throughout childhood and adolescence, children have a wide range of preferred learning times, and there is no one time of the day that is good for everyone in any particular age group.

The Balanced Day Student Survey indicates forty-nine percent of Halton elementary students that participated in the survey from the pilot schools sites do not have a preferred learning time. Fifteen percent of the students preferred the second learning block, ten percent selected the third learning block, nine percent selected the first and third learning blocks, eight percent indicated a preference for the first learning block, six percent selected the first and second learning blocks and three percent indicated the second and third learning blocks were preferred. The first learning block, representing early to mid-morning was not selected by a majority of students as a preferred learning time.

Literacy

A growing body of research indicates that elementary students working below grade level do better on reading tasks in the afternoon. Barron, Henderson, and Spurgeon (1994) found an overall increase in reading scores for below-grade-level students who received instruction in the afternoon as compared with those of a similar group who received the same instruction in the morning.

School, Teacher, and Student-Level Factors

A variety of school factors (safe and orderly environment, monitoring, time, opportunity to learn, parental involvement), teacher factors (instructional strategies, student-teacher relationships, classroom management) and student-level factors (nutrition, sleep patterns, home environmental factors) also influence children's abilities to learn effectively throughout the school day. There is some evidence to suggest that student achievement increases when students are taught during the teacher's preferred time of day (Ammons, Booker, and Killmon 1995).

Another significant factor related to the use of time is "pacing". The Balanced Day timetable allows for significant learning blocks separated by significant nutrition/recreation breaks.

Question: Foregoing a regular lunchtime is inconsistent with regular family mealtimes and "real world" circumstances.

Families practice a variety of routines regarding meals depending on a wide number of factors. Some of these might include: the age of the children, parental work schedules, cultural practices, extra-curricular activities e.g. soccer practice, baseball games, music lessons. School scheduling affects only the mid-day nutritional break.