

Epiphany of Our Lord Catholic Academy

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September 2013

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Beginning in September, we will be locally piloting and implementing a **Balanced School Day (BSD)** schedule. Our entire school day timetable will be different and the way we do some things will require some period of adjustment on the part of students, teachers, and parents – Essentially, the Balanced School Day is a new way of scheduling class time and break time that has been introduced in many Ontario schools both public and private over the past eight years. School still starts at 9:00 am and still ends at 3:30 pm, but everything in between is different (See attached Timetable).

The traditional Regular School Day (RSD) schedule includes a 15-minute recess break in the morning, then one-hour for lunch at noon, and finally a similar 15-minute break in the afternoon.

The Balanced School Day (BSD) schedule is different because it includes only two breaks during the day whereby each break can be from 40-50 minutes long - essentially one break in the morning (40 minutes) and one break in the afternoon (50 minutes). There is no one hour break for lunch. Instead, both breaks include time for eating and time for physical activity. Undeniably, eating patterns and play routines are, by far, the biggest adjustment for all of us – especially for the adults! It should be noted that children will be able to snack during class time in order for their eating patterns to establish – This allows for a smooth transition to the new “lunch” or “snack” periods.

I have attached a “demo” timetable of what a Balanced School Day looks like ... the key is “balance” – kids will be eating, staying active, and engaged in learning for a regular period of time – instructional time does not change from the Regular School Day Schedule – time is just utilized more efficiently and effectively.

The key is to teach/train kids (and staff) to eat during both “SNACK” times and then they play during both times. Some people like to look at the 2nd Break as a lunch, and that’s okay too. The key is for parents to provide snacks/foods for both periods and for kids to eat and drink during both breaks. If you partake in snack program (and I strongly urge you to do so), the first snack period will pretty much be taken care of for you, but you can give more food until you and your child figure out just how much food is right for him/her.

Also, please see the following pages for more information about the Balanced School Day. We will meet in September at a CSAC meeting to discuss and review this pilot project and its implementation.

Take care,

J. Masciarelli
Principal

What is a Balanced School Day?

The Balanced School Day is a new way of scheduling class time and break time that has been introduced in many Ontario schools both public and private over the past eight years.

The traditional Regular School Day (RSD) schedule usually includes 15-minute recess breaks in the morning and in the afternoon, and one hour for lunch at noon.

The Balanced School Day (BSD) is different because it includes two breaks that are each 30-50 minutes long, with one break in the morning and one in the afternoon. There is no one hour break for lunch. Instead, these two breaks include time for eating and time for physical activity, usually about 15 - 25 minutes for each.

A **Balanced School Day** schedule will look something like this:

School starts: 9:00am

Food Break & Recess #1: 10:45 – 11:25 am

Food Break & Recess #2: 1:05 – 1:55 pm

If child goes home for lunch, this would be the time to go given the increased time for travel and eating

School ends: 3:30 pm

Why change the traditional schedule?

The BSD is based upon the brain compatible theory which states that academic achievement is enhanced with the alignment of proper nutrition, effective exercise, and consistent and routine teaching/learning sets. Supporters of BSD say that this timetable not only allows students longer periods to eat and engage in physical activity, but also larger blocks of time for lessons with fewer interruptions – more efficient and effective use of time.

While there is little formal evidence to support one timetable over another, observational research has been favourable to BSD. Some suggested benefits of BSD noted by parents, students, and staff from other schools who have piloted the timetable include:

- More relaxed and focused students throughout the day
- Improved learning and increased interest in school work
- Reduced incidents in the school yard and more uninterrupted instructional time
- More opportunities for students to pursue co-curricular and intramural activities
- Reduced sun exposure at lunch
- Less uneaten food returning home, therefore students are not as hungry after school
- Fewer transition periods and time spent going in and out of school during the day
- Opportunities for school practices during the day (and not need to stay after school)
- Time afforded during the break for kids to collaboratively complete assigned work during break times (if desired) and less work going home as homework
- Opportunities to do intramurals, clubs, and other co-curricular activities without having to sacrifice eating your lunch (both students and staff)
- Improved student concentration and energy levels ... eating throughout the day
- Positive influence on student achievement and health

Questions and Answers:

1. Why are we trying a Balanced School Day in September?

Answer – The first part of the handout explains the benefits of a balanced school day. We have been thinking about implementing a balanced school day for 2013-14 in order to better utilize instructional time and achieve the gains that come along with this scheduling change. We thought the best way to see if we liked it or not, was to try it out for an extended period of time. Hopefully, by the end of April 2014, we will have a better understanding how students, staff, and parents support the idea.

2. What should I pack for my student's lunch?

Answer – We always want to see students eat healthy. Instead of the traditional recess snack and noon hour lunch, students will have two nutritional breaks at 10:45 am and 1:05pm. By 10:45am your child may not want to eat a lot, but by 1:05 pm they may be hungry.

The challenge will be for students not to eat too much in the first nutritional break and keep enough food for the second nutritional break. Here are some good websites to check regarding what to pack for a balanced school day lunch:

<http://www.peelregion.ca/health/eating/kids/pdfs/cool-lunch-ideas-apr07.pdf>

<http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/School-Health/Articles/Food-for-a-Balanced-School-Day.aspx>

<http://ihom.hwcdsb.ca/school/belltimes/?fileID=4195>

http://www.durham.ca/departments/health/food_nutrition/healthy_eating/nts/Parent%20Handout%20Cool%20Lunch%20Ideas%20for%20the%20Balanced%20School%20Day.pdf

3. Where will the student be eating?

Answer – For both nutritional breaks the students will be eating in their classrooms. Then, students will be going out for Active Play. There may be times where this can be flipped or time varied (i.e., 10 minutes outside on very cold days and more time inside, etc.). We will play with the breakdown of the times, but the time block is set in stone.

4. Will I be asked if I liked the Balanced School Day?

Answer – Early in May 2014, we will survey students, parents, and staff about the Balanced School Day. Hopefully, by mid-May or early June, we can share the results and make a decision about the 2014-15 school year.

5. Is the schedule in the handout set in stone?

Answer – Yes and No. As this is new to us, we may have to change some times and routines as we experience the balanced school day. However, any changes that occur will not be dramatic and will be for internal purposes – for our Nutritional Beaks, things are pretty much set.

Facts about the Balanced School Day

Research has indicated that the Balanced School Day was developed due to several issues caused by the traditional scheduling of classes. First of all, the Balanced Day schedules instruction in three blocks of time. Williams (1999) found that a longer block of time was better for the delivery of instruction.

“Teaching in the longer blocks of the Balance Day requires different instructional approaches and allows teachers to use various strategies in a single period” (Bryant & Bryant, 2000).

Irmsher (1996) commented that “Larger blocks of time allow for a more flexible and productive classroom environment, along with more opportunities for using varied and interactive teaching methods.”

Fewer transitions in the day also means that students have more time on task in the classroom. Fox, Hoskin, Short, and Woehrle (2003) found that it takes between six and seven minutes for students to be ready for instruction after the recess bell rings. Add to this figure the approximately five minute estimate that it takes for students to get ready before recess, and, in the traditional school day, most children will use 33 minutes per day in transitions. With only two breaks, that number will decrease to approximately 22 minutes per day. In one week alone, students will have 50 minutes more instructional time with the BSD than the traditional day.

Reducing transitions results in increased learning time, improved classroom management, and ultimately more learning for students. (Winn, Menlove, & Zsiray, 1997). Williams (1999)

The research on nutrition and learning indicates that children need smaller meals more frequently, in order to stay alert and focused in class. Jensen (1995) stated, “Make sure your learners are given several opportunities to eat nutritious snacks throughout the day”.

“Research has proven that well-fed bodies help young brains work better” (Kalinowski, 2003, p. K4).

“In another study in Mexico, Cravioto reported that well-fed learners rated higher in communication skills and did better in the classroom” (Jensen, 1996, p. 74). The BSD provides this scenario, and the teachers in the focus group could definitely see the benefits of students eating later in the day.

Although the students had three breaks with the traditional school day, the two recess breaks were more a playtime than a structured eating time.

According to the research, meaningful exercise is also an important component of a healthy learning environment. The BSD allows students to eat inside rather than try to have a snack while playing or exercising. It is difficult for students to run around and exercise when they are trying to snack, and the BSD provides opportunity for both necessary activities at separate times. “The mind, brain, and body are one. When children are deprived of vigorous recess activities the body's heart isn't given the opportunity to pump fresh oxygen into the blood to nourish a sluggish brain” (International Play Association, n.d.)