

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

May 14, 2024

*"In the school of the Lord we are all schoolmates."
~ St. Augustine, Sermon 242, 1*

Dear Austin Prep Parents and Students,

I'm writing to share information about changes to the Master Schedule for the upcoming 2024-2025 school year. As referenced in previous communications, most recently in my March 2024 State of the School message, I appointed a committee of faculty and staff at the start of the academic year to explore master schedule options to better meet the evolving needs of the Austin Prep community.

Master Schedule Committee

Michael McLaughlin, *Head of Middle School*, Committee Co-Chair

AJ Benning, *Dean of Students*, Committee Co-Chair

Sue Belanger, *Assistant Head for Administration and Special Projects*

Stephanie Choate, *English Faculty Chair*

Michelle Connor, P '25, '28, *Assistant Head of School*

Patrick Driscoll '97, *Director of Athletics*

Nate Piccini '93, *History Faculty*

Sr. Maria Nassali, D.M., *Director of Campus Ministry*

Marla Pascucci-Byrne, P '26, '30, *Art and Design Chair*

Alison Pliskaner, *Math Chair*

Cori Russo, *World Language Faculty, Latin*

Lisa Simmons, P'24, '25, '27, '30, *Interim Director of Admissions*

Cassandra Thompson, *English Faculty*

Austin Prep's current rotating block master schedule was implemented in the mid-1990's. Since that time, teaching and learning, student needs and expectations, social mores, college admissions processes, instructional best practices, and employment trends have evolved. Although there has been some tweaking and adjusting of the current master schedule over the years, it essentially remains a 1990's instrument facilitating 21st century education. With the growth of curricula and expanded offerings at Austin Prep, the master schedule is evolving as part of our overall strategic growth and consistent modernization.

Enacting a master schedule change is considerable, and one of the key aspects of successful implementation is allowing sufficient lead time. As planned, the adaptation of the master schedule will follow a phased, multi-year approach with some adjustments being implemented in the 2024-2025 academic year and additional adjustments being implemented in 2025-2026. In addition to the experience and expertise of the faculty Master Scheduling Committee, we also retained the services of Independent School Management (ISM) for further recommendations and insight.

The Master Schedule Committee met regularly all year and they recently submitted their first recommendation, which I have accepted. This fall, we will be taking the first step in our transition to a new master schedule. The new weekly schedule will be modified to include dismissal from classes at 1:00 p.m. every Wednesday. Dismissal at 1:00 p.m. will allocate time for students to pursue and excel in the unwritten curriculum, those additional unique experiences that also contribute to their learning and the formation of their Augustinian hearts and minds.

Similar to our implementation of the 2-week break in March, aligning with peer independent schools in the [NEPSAC](#) contributed to the Committee's recommendation. Many schools in the NEPSAC have an early dismissal on Wednesdays to accommodate athletics. As you might suspect, without a 1:00 p.m. dismissal over the last 2 years since Austin Prep joined the NEPSAC, there was an overabundance of students missing class time since a large number of athletic contests occur on Wednesday afternoons.

This modification will provide all of our students with additional opportunities for enrichment, academic support, and extracurricular activities. While students may depart campus on Wednesdays at 1:00 p.m., we invite and encourage them to engage in activities that will be offered on a scheduled and rotating basis. These are activities and initiatives such as

- seeking extra help or tutoring sessions for academic support;
- defined time for making up tests, quizzes, and assignments;
- meeting with advisors and counselors;
- Christian service and afternoon Mass;
- attending extended rehearsals for arts programs;
- participating in athletic practices and games;
- engaging in select club activities.

Although the end of the academic day on Wednesdays will occur at 1:00 p.m., the total weekly instructional time for our students will not be decreased. In fact, the adjusted schedule increases academic contact time by 28 minutes over the course of a week. This was achieved by creating some efficiencies in the schedule, decreasing passing time, and by starting the academic day five minutes earlier at 7:55 a.m. each morning.

Faculty will be involved in student programming following dismissal on Wednesdays, but also will have dedicated time to collaborate, engage in professional development, enhance their teaching practices, and advance excellence in teaching and learning. The school building will remain open to students from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily as it is now.

Understandably, parents and students may have questions about the mechanics of the schedule. The Master Schedule Committee has put together some [graphics and additional information](#) that explains the schedule rotation and logistics. Additionally, the Academic Office will be in touch over the course of the summer with details about webinars to explain how the schedule changes will function and to provide additional information about the menu of Wednesday offerings.

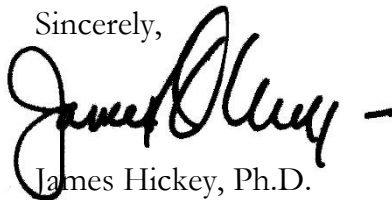
I'm grateful to the Master Schedule Committee for their professionalism, commitment, and earnest efforts. Their Wednesday dismissal recommendation was presented to the entire faculty and a parent focus group for feedback and perspective. We also solicited student input. We invited questions and input from these groups for improvement or to refine aspects of the schedule that might have been overlooked. I'm pleased to share there were no suggestions to make material changes to the Master Schedule Committee's recommendation.

We will be in touch again with additional information. In the meantime, if you have questions about the mechanics or the logistics of the master schedule, please be in touch with either of the Committee Co-Chairs:

Michael McLaughlin (mmclaughlin@austinprep.org), Head of Middle School
AJ Benning (anthony.benning@austinprep.org), Dean of Students

If I can be helpful, I invite you, as always, to reach out directly. We value your partnership as we journey together forward in mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Hickey" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

James Hickey, Ph.D.
Head of School