



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NEW ARDSLEY HIGH SCHOOL ROTATING DROP SCHEDULE

Thank you to everyone who submitted a question to our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) email address. We have created the following document in an effort to provide as much information as possible, as clearly as we can. In some cases, questions have been combined and/or streamlined for clarity. Please understand that the implementation of this schedule is still eight months away, and we are working with our high school community to hash out some of the specific details of the schedule. We hope the information below helps promote understanding of the schedule, how it will work, and the factors we considered in developing the schedule.

In an effort to continue to provide requested information about the schedule, we are going to keep the question email address open: schedulingquestions@ardsleyschools.org.

You can continue to send questions there about the new schedule. Periodically, over the next eight months, as we receive additional questions, we will produce additional FAQ documents.

1. Can you please explain the “Unit Lunch”? How will it work?

The hour provided every day in the middle of the day, called “Unit Lunch,” can best be described as a “flex period”. It can be used by students for a variety of purposes, including:

- Extra help at academic assistance centers.
- Meeting with teachers for extra support, questions, and clarification.
- Gathering with other students for group work meetings, collaboration, and study sessions.
- Music rehearsals and lessons.
- Time to study and/or do homework.
- Opportunities to read, relax, or access the wellness center.
- Mid-day nutrition such as lunch or a snack.
- Informal club meetings with other students.
- Meeting with a counselor or other school professional.

With flexibility to structure the hour to meet their needs, students will be on varying timelines

during this period. This will spread out the number of students accessing any one of the activities or spaces listed above. This should help minimize heavy crowding, while increasing time for extra help, study groups, and other tasks students may struggle to do after school. Students generally spend about 15 to 20 minutes eating lunch each day. They can spend the full hour in the cafeteria, but according to the schools we have spoken with who have a unit lunch, students typically use the period for multiple purposes.

2. How will the entire student body be accommodated in one lunch period? Will there be additional food service stations? Will there be increased supervision during lunch?

This was the most asked question sent to our FAQ mailbox. The answer is YES, we can accommodate all students during a unit lunch. As part of our process of putting together this new schedule, we have visited other schools with a unit lunch. We learned that, during the first two weeks of school, many of the students come during the first part of lunch to the cafeteria to eat. This is because they do not need extra help, or have group assignments yet.

By mid-to-late September, the cafeteria typically becomes less busy at any given time during that hour. Some students will go see a teacher, participate in an alternative activity, or meet with peers at the beginning of lunch, while others will head directly to the cafeteria. Many seniors leave campus during lunch, and the longer lunch period reduces rushing, which makes it safer for them to get to their destination and drive back to school. As such, it is rare that all students will be eating at once.

During those rare instances, including at the beginning of the school year, we will be able to accommodate our students. Currently we do not use our entire back cafeteria or commons area during lunch, and there is room for additional students in our front cafeteria as well. We are currently looking at adding a variety of seating options including counter seating, bistro tables, long rectangular tables, and even standing tables. This way there is space for students who want to grab food quickly and go to see a teacher, and those who want to spend more time sitting and socializing. While we are still considering different options for where we will set up tables, there are plenty of spaces in the cafeteria and commons areas to add tables and chairs for students to eat. Wherever we identify as a space for lunch, we will be sure there are enough seats for students to have a place that is comfortable and conducive to eating their lunch. We fully intend to start the school year setting up enough seats for all students. The beginning of the year also allows for outdoor seating, and we plan to increase seating in our courtyard as well.

Our food service provider is an outside vendor that provides school lunches in multiple school districts. Many of the districts they serve have a unit lunch. They have developed strategies to get students access to food as quickly as possible. They can set up kiosks in other areas of the cafeteria with some food items, have carts with hot food, a second deli line, and additional places for students to pay for lunch items. We are working closely with them to be sure we can expand point of sale locations for students, and move them in and out of the food lines, and get them eating as quickly as possible. We are looking at all of those options. Most of our students are done eating within 20-30 minutes. Students will then have the rest of the unit lunch period to use as they see fit.

We will need to have some increased supervision. To provide this supervision, we will work with our security team, and reassign other staff to be sure there is supervision in all areas where students are during lunch. We are confident that this hour in the middle of the day will be a highlight of the new schedule. It is a flexible time for students to get things done, see teachers, talk to a counselor, take a break, eat, and take a deep breath. Schools that use a unit lunch speak extremely highly of its value in providing students with a true break during the day. This flex time also provides students with an opportunity to practice time management and take initiative to get what they need out of the time.

The flex period allows our students to function more like college students. They will gain experience planning their time. Doing this in high school allows us to help students, who have difficulty with the reduced structure, navigate a situation where they need to be able to use time to their advantage. The flex period provides us with the opportunity to develop their executive functioning skills in a safe and supportive environment.

3. If the academic centers are staffed during the unit lunch and the extra help time is provided during the unit lunch, will students be able to access their teachers who may be staffing an academic center? How will students access teachers if all students are trying to access them at the same time?

One of the things that has been reported to us over and over again in surveys and focus groups with students is that ninth period extra help is often crowded, and it can be difficult to get individual help from the teacher during that period. It is also important to remember that currently, ninth period is offered 3 days per week, and lasts 37 minutes. The hour-long flex period adds another 20 minutes per day to extra help time, and expands this time to 5 days per week. It is anticipated that the crowds will diminish due to the ability to space out visits to see teachers. For example, some students will eat first then go see their teacher, some students will go see their teacher and then eat, others may visit the teacher in the middle of the period. If the crowds are not “naturally” evening out, teachers can assign certain classes to come at the beginning of the unit lunch and some at the end of the period to more purposely spread out the visitors.

Although we are still considering different options for scheduling the flex period extra help centers, we have talked a lot about how we might staff the help centers while ensuring the opportunity for students to see their teachers. The solution will likely involve teachers being available to see their own students during lunch on most days, and helping other students in the help centers when assigned to that responsibility. If students need help with a skill or a question about content, they can go to the extra help center, where they might not see their own teacher, but will see a teacher who knows the content or subject area. Students can also have something to eat while taking advantage of the services provided in the help centers.

We expect that the additional 20 minutes, and the additional flexibility during this time, will actually improve students' access to teachers and will mitigate the crowds that currently exist in some teachers' classrooms during ninth period.

4. If a student does not want to have lunch, does this force them to have lunch?

While providing an *opportunity* for lunch for every student every day is a priority in the new schedule, there is no requirement for students to eat during the mid-day flex period. While we highly recommend that they do, for health reasons, we will not be monitoring who eats and who doesn't. Other spaces, options, and support resources will be available to students during this time. Having a unit lunch does not mandate that everyone eats, but it does create a time where no students are taking classes in the middle of the day. The concept of the "lunch hour" has been practiced in the professional world for many, many years. This breaking up of the day has been shown to be good for managing mental health and stress.

5. How will music sectionals operate under the new schedule? Can sectionals be offered during the unit lunch period rather than requiring students to skip other classes to participate in sectionals?

We have visited a school that holds their music sectionals during the unit lunch, and it works very well for them. One benefit of this approach is that we could avoid pulling students out of classes or other learning experiences. One of our music teachers has already committed to serve on the AHS Building Scheduling Committee, which will be meeting regularly throughout the spring, to ensure we manage this issue as effectively as possible. The current schedule of Monday afternoon and Friday morning sectionals will be able to continue.

6. Many classes, particularly advanced placement (AP) classes, currently struggle to cover all of the content in the course of the school year. How will they be able to accomplish this if there are fewer minutes dedicated to each class?

While each class is reduced by a number of minutes in the new schedule, the new schedule also minimizes transitions, which adds meaningful instructional minutes to every class. Currently, our high school classes move at a fast pace. The 44 minute periods are over very quickly. It takes time for a teacher to take attendance, focus their students, and begin instruction. It then takes additional time to conclude a lesson at the end of a period, review the instruction, and assign homework. Currently, each beginning and end of the class can take up 25% of the entire instructional period. The new schedule cuts the number of transition times by 25% per class over the course of the school year. This means that significantly less time is used for commencing and concluding instruction, and more class time can be used for deeper, meaningful, valuable and high interest instruction, including lecture, demonstration, guided practice, and independent practice for students. The reduction of transition time should more than make up for the loss of scheduled instructional minutes over the course of the year, providing more productive instructional time for all classes. Teachers who have taught in longer class periods report being able to dive into topics more deeply and completely and not having to rush as much to fit in the required content before having to move to closure on a lesson. Having a variety of instructional formats in a class period also more effectively engages students.

7. Will we have enough classroom space to accommodate the additional classes?

Yes. We are currently adding multiple new instructional spaces at AHS, which are set to open in the fall. We also have open spaces throughout the day that we will utilize for some of the new and additional classes we intend to provide. We have looked at our room utilization, taken into consideration the new instructional spaces we will have available next year, and are confident we have the spaces to accommodate the new schedule.

8. How many courses will be added to the course catalog? Will classes be offered at multiple levels, or only advanced classes?

We had already planned to add several new AP courses for next year. We have also added multiple interest-based elective courses for students who may not want the additional AP classes. We are hopeful that, with the addition of an 8th instructional period in the new schedule, we will be able to offer more creative interest-based elective courses, as well as providing opportunities to access higher level AP classes.

For the current year (2025-2026), we added several new elective courses. We were not able to run some of these courses because students simply did not have room in their schedule to take them. We are hopeful we will be able to run more of them as students will have the room in their schedules to explore interests and take classes that excite them. We think that our students will find some very exciting new courses in the 2026-2027 AHS course catalog.

9. Is there interest among the students to take additional courses?

Yes. The students and counselors have reported to us a desire to be able to take more classes. This is why nearly 30% of our students forgo lunch or any break in the school day to take additional classes. Students express to their counselors each year that they feel limited in their ability to take interesting classes that are not required because there is not enough room in their schedule. This was a major piece of feedback that we heard in student focus groups last year. Our students want to be able to take classes that are exciting and interesting. The new schedule gives them more access to those courses. For the 30% that already take an 8th class, the new schedule provides them with a break and time to eat.

10. Will students be able to have free periods instead of taking an eighth class? Will supervision be provided for these students?

While we are still considering different options, we do believe that some students will be able to take a study hall period if desired. All classes and/or study halls will be supervised.

11. How might this new schedule help students be more college ready?

Colleges typically do not operate in a manner that resembles a traditional high school schedule. Most college classes are longer than 44 minutes, and students do not have every subject every day. College students have different classes each day, and have to manage a work load that may involve more in-depth assignments over several days as opposed to nightly homework. Students in college generally have breaks in their day, where they need to organize study-groups, find time to do independent work, and schedule "office

time” with professors when they need assistance with work. In college, each day of the week is different, and students learn to pace themselves depending on what they need to accomplish and produce for that day. In all of those ways, the rotating drop schedule resembles a college schedule and helps students develop time management skills that will be useful when navigating a college schedule.

12. How will students with executive functioning challenges manage this schedule? How will we support students who struggle to stay organized even under the current, simpler schedule?

As we have spoken to other districts that utilize a similar schedule, we have learned that students across academic and executive functioning skill levels adjust well to a rotating drop schedule, which quickly becomes a daily routine much like the current schedule. We are told that, for many students who struggle with executive functioning skills, having two fewer classes per day, two fewer transitions, and fewer daily homework assignments is a welcome change. The longer class periods also allow teachers to focus on additional instructional strategies, which helps with learning management. Time is built into the period to address executive functioning, answer questions, and provide individual help during class time. Our IEP students will continue to have the types of supports they have always had, and our counselors will monitor and meet with students who may need additional assistance adjusting to the new schedule. Once fully implemented, we believe the slower, more deliberate pace of this schedule will be beneficial to students who struggle with transitions and readjusting throughout the day.

13. Some students struggle to focus through a 44 minute class. How will we hope these students adjust to a 57 minute class?

We will provide time for our teachers to update lessons, have professional development opportunities, and adjust to the new schedule. A 57 minute class will be “chunked” into different types of activities and learning experiences. Some of our teachers already teach this way, and some will have to make adjustments and reallocate their instructional time. We understand that a 57 minute lecture is not optimal for most students, and it is not our intention to have students sit and listen for that period of time. We know that the best lessons are student-centered, active, and varied. This change in schedule will allow us to become even more hands-on, active, and student-centered in our instructional approach. One of our neighboring districts has a schedule with significantly longer class periods, and we will speak with them (among others) about how they approach lesson design to ensure student engagement.

14. How does this impact students with an IEP? When will they receive their services?

In preparing to move to the new schedule, our special education leaders in the district have spoken with their peers in other districts. They continue to meet with and reach out to the professionals in those districts to ensure we are well versed in the best practices of accommodating our IEP students and ensuring they receive the services they are entitled to as effectively in the new schedule. We know it can be done and done well. We are confident that our special education administrators are ready to provide the best educational services possible for students, and we will emulate those practices that have worked in

other districts.

15. Will we maintain our Friday schedule?

Yes. We plan to maintain the curriculum hour, which takes place on Friday morning. Therefore, we will continue to hold music rehearsals on Friday mornings, with a one-hour later start time for all other students.

16. Why does the schedule rotate only in the morning and afternoon? If there is an advantage to having classes at different times of the day why not do a whole day rotation?

We decided to have a morning and afternoon rotation because we have itinerant teachers who work in multiple schools in our school district. In order for schools to continue to share teachers, we have to limit the teachers to one half of the day at any one particular school. This way, as needed, teachers can teach at AHS either in the morning or the afternoon, and at another school at the opposite time of day.

17. How does the new schedule help to fix transportation issues? How do these two topics connect?

While we are making this adjustment to our schedule, we also see this as an opportunity to address a significant bussing issue in the district, particularly as it pertains to the high school. Currently we do our pick-up at AHS at the end of eighth period, and have done so for years. This means that some students do not have access to ninth period extra help because they need to catch the bus home before ninth period begins. Moving extra help to the middle of the day with the new schedule will give all students access to extra help during the day, and allows the district to move the transportation from the high school to later in the afternoon, since the school day will end with an actual class and students will be accommodated with bussing at the end of the school day. Changing the end-of-day logistics means we also can move the buses to bring students to the high school later in the morning, solving the issue of students getting dropped off almost an hour before school starts. While the new high school schedule and the transportation schedule are not completely dependent on one another, the change in the high school daily schedule creates a necessity to move back our high school bussing runs, and creates an opportunity to address a significant and long-standing issue with our transportation procedures.

18. The presentation on the Rotating Drop says “ask a friend”. Can you provide the names of some of the other districts that have this type of schedule?

Many of our neighboring districts have moved to a Rotating Drop Schedule or an Eighty Minute Block Schedule. Most schools who move to these schedules have a unit lunch. If you know someone from one of these school districts, they can likely provide some insight into the experience of following these schedules and having a unit lunch.

- Bronxville
- Hastings
- Rye
- Byram Hills
- Nyack
- Pearl River
- Blind Brook

- Scarsdale

19. In what ways was community input taken into consideration as this decision was made?

Several years ago a committee of community members was set up to explore multiple schedules to bring to Ardsley. This committee did a lot of research, listening, and speaking with people from other districts that used different schedules. At the end, they recommended that Ardsley move to a rotating drop schedule. Last year I conducted multiple listening sessions with parents, staff, and students as part of my entry plan. Clear themes emerged through the feedback about the pace of the school day, the number of students who were not able to access lunch each day, the level of stress that the pace of the day and the nightly homework was causing students (and teachers), and the desire for students to access additional courses at the high school. These findings were reported publicly, shared at a Board of Education meeting, and posted to the website. It was clear that the committee's recommendation of the rotating drop schedule and the implementation of a new schedule would address the concerns brought up by students, parents, and teachers in the listening sessions last year. As we did more listening and learning over the summer and during the beginning of this year, including talking with people in other districts who have moved to a similar schedule, we realized there was a great opportunity to make the high school experience a better one for our students by finally implementing the recommendation of the original committee.

20. Does the Board need to vote on this proposed change? If so, when will that vote occur?

As this change will likely necessitate budgetary changes, what happens if the community does not approve the proposed budget due to these additional expenditures?

The adjustment of the schedule does not require a Board of Education vote, although we have worked closely with Board Members through the process of studying, developing, and proposing the new schedule. Importantly, while our plans to offer additional courses, programs, and support resources to students may involve budgetary changes, those changes are not necessarily tied to the schedule change itself.

Under New York state law, if the school budget is defeated, the board of education typically has two options: hold a second budget vote, or immediately adopt a contingency budget. Under a contingency budget, a school district must adopt a budget with no tax levy increase and eliminate all non-contingent expenses, such as certain student supplies, certain equipment purchases and the free community use of school facilities (the district must charge a fee). The administrative budget would also be subject to certain restrictions. These restrictions would apply to our district irrespective of the particular structure or schedule of the school day and would apply to all three schools.