



FPS ELEMENTARY SCHEDULE FAQ

During the March 10 Board of Education meeting, a presentation on the elementary school schedule highlighted the district's core commitments to students and staff: creating a consistent schedule, setting realistic expectations, and ensuring dedicated time for both core academics and special area classes.

The presentation was developed by a committee that met over the fall and winter to review and refine the schedule. The committee examined both Fairfield's current schedule and those of other districts to determine what would work best for our schools, taking into account curriculum, number of schools, and contractual requirements. Student achievement was also a central focus, ensuring that our youngest learners have a strong foundation to support their growth as skills and content become more rigorous throughout their K-12 experience.

Changes like this can naturally raise questions, and keeping families informed throughout the process remains a priority. Therefore, we have developed an FAQ to help provide accurate information for families.

Why make the change?

Currently, elementary students have more time scheduled in their day than the day has available minutes. For example, a fifth-grade student is scheduled for over 2 hours of instructional time beyond what is available in the elementary cycle. In a six-day cycle, a fifth-grade student would have to remain in school for an additional 24 minutes each day beyond dismissal to meet the allotted time for each subject. Basically, teachers and administrators are attempting an impossible task: scheduling a day that simply does not fit current commitments.

How does the schedule currently work?

The short answer is that the time frames do not fit. In general, scheduled time beyond available minutes simply does not occur. For example, when the art is longer, or when students are taking Spanish lessons, they take the place of instruction in language arts, math, science, or social studies. Moreover, we know that elementary students take time to start and end their day, or to transition from one activity to another. The proposed changes include these transitions without sacrificing instructional minutes in any given area.

How did the proposal come about?

Over the years, more expectations were added to the schedule. Unfortunately, when additions occurred, the corresponding changes did not. If we are going to commit to ensuring each student has an appropriate program of study, we must ensure it aligns with our time commitments and constraints.

Will students lose art time and other special area classes?

Over the course of six years, students will gain about 30 hours of art. It is true that current students in grades 1-4 will have fewer art minutes over time. In addition, in collaboration with our music program, chorus in grade five will be a standard 45 minutes per cycle. It is currently 55 minutes. STEAM will also be changed and will not be a separate block. The grade-level science standards will be shifted back to the science block. Finally, Spanish becomes a special-area class. It is currently a “drop-in” class at some point during the week. By placing it in the schedule, it becomes consistent in the rotation. Finally, all specials will have a 45-minute block. This is an increase in time for special area classes in library, music, and physical education.

Why can't more time be added for specials?

Adding time to specials would require us to remove time from somewhere else. In addition, each school must have a minimum of six specials' blocks scheduled throughout the day. While students are in their special period, classroom teachers are planning.

Will language arts and math get more time?

Yes, language arts will be 120 minutes in grades 1-5 (110 in kindergarten), and math will be 80 minutes in grades 1-5 (70 in kindergarten). Although this appears to be an increase in time, it resulted from eliminating the WINN (What I Need Now) period as a separate block. Currently, all elementary students have a separate 30-minute WINN period during the day. Although many things can happen during this period, it is mainly dedicated to intervention for students who may need additional support in language arts and/or math. Those 30 minutes were added back to the ELA and math block. We believe it is best to intervene for students in the core block. This will be a better use of student and teacher time.

Why not have a Monday-to-Friday or a five-day schedule?

The scheduling committee reviewed several different iterations of schedules, including a 5-day rotation. The 5-day rotation further constrained the schedule and offered fewer special area courses.

The presentation showed 7 special offerings in a six-day cycle. Why not only have six?

The seventh special allows for grade-level planning. This is an important characteristic of the elementary schedule. It allows teachers teaching the same grade level to collaborate and plan. By doing so, more consistent instruction can occur across our schools.