

Frequently Asked Questions: School Schedules, updated March 15, 2010

Will there be fewer early release days next school year?

Yes, we are reducing the overall number of early release days for all students for next school year. Currently, we have 10 early release days for staff to work together to improve student learning and have heard from parents that this is too many. For 2010-11, we will apply for a state waiver to combine four early release days into two no school days for students, plus reduce the remaining number of early release days to four. In addition, the elementary and middle school early release conference schedule will remain the same for next school year, and the two early release days prior to Thanksgiving and winter break will also continue. Elementary, middle and high school staff members use the time on early release days to improve student learning by planning and working with their colleagues on instruction, curriculum, assessment, professional development, parent/family/teacher conferences and communication. The school year calendar will be updated this spring and posted at <http://bellingshamschools.org/audience/calendars>

Will my children get the amount of instructional time that is required by federal law?

Yes. Both the current schedule and next year's school schedule for children in kindergarten and grades 1-12 exceed the federal education requirements for instruction as defined by the Basic Education Act, RCW28A.150.220.

How will the amount of instructional time change for elementary school children with all grades having the same start and end times next year?

Currently, students in grades 1-2 have 1,550 minutes of instructional time per week in literacy, math, science and social studies. Physical education, music and the arts are currently provided by the classroom teacher as time and space allows.

Students in grades 3-5 currently have 1,625 minutes of instructional time per week in literacy, math, science, social studies and the arts, plus 225 minutes per week with specialists for physical education and music.

Next year, all students in grades 1-5 will have 1,625 minutes of instructional time per week in literacy, math, science, social studies and the arts, plus at least 75 minutes per week with specialists for physical education and music. Students in grades 3-5 will have the same amount of core instructional time next year as they have this year. Students in grades 1-2 will have 75 more minutes each week of core instructional time and will now have access to specialists for physical education and music. Kindergarteners will also have music and physical education instruction from specialists. This increase in core instructional time for our youngest children is important for their future academic success as they develop foundational literacy and thinking skills.

We are unable to extend the school day beyond this amount without additional state funding. When students are spending time in physical education or music with specialists, we provide required planning time for teachers.

Our schools offer a variety of before- and after-school enrichment activities for children. We also have many schools that have started to successfully integrate arts, music and world language instruction with student learning in the areas of literacy, math, social studies, science and physical education.

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How will elementary school students receive the average of 100 instructional minutes per week in physical education that are required?

The Bellingham School District is very aware of RCW 28A.230.040 and WAC 392.410.135 regarding instructional hours required for physical education in grades 1 through 8. The law does not require that the physical education hours be taught by specialists. Our district will provide 40 of the 100 minutes through instruction taught by physical education specialists and the other 60 minutes in various ways such as health and wellness instruction within the classroom, units taught by the classroom teacher, etc. Currently, classroom teachers provide all of the physical education instruction in grades 1-2. We are pleased that our students beginning in kindergarten will now have time with physical education specialists and teachers.