

Piedmont Unified School District
Elementary School Instructional Program Design
Answers to Frequently Asked Questions
Revised May 23, 2016

Piedmont Unified is continually assessing and refining its educational programs, to further the District's fundamental goal of educational excellence. Educational programs and objectives at the elementary, middle and high school level must keep pace with the changing needs of the world outside the classroom. Readiness for higher education requires different types of knowledge, different educational experiences, and a different set of skills than in the past. To serve the needs of elementary students, it is essential to offer students a broad range of educational opportunities. For example, elementary students must have the opportunity to: learn through project-based exploration and collaboration; investigate connections among different areas of study; work individually and in groups; and take full advantage of modern educational technologies. Equally important, teachers must have adequate time to collaborate with their peers, prepare and reflect on lessons, and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

For the past 18 months, Piedmont Unified's three elementary schools have been assessing the educational needs of elementary students -- particularly as they relate to new reading, math, science, and social/emotional health curriculum implemented in recent years -- and how the school-day schedule could be modified to better meet these needs. This assessment culminated in a proposal to modify the school-day schedule, and this FAQ provides answers to frequently asked questions about this proposal. The Board of Education will consider this proposal on May 25th.

Why Change the Current School-Day Schedule?

The elementary school day is divided into 30-minute instructional blocks interspersed with blocks of time for physical education, art, music, computer science, recess, lunch, and library, and this configuration does not support current curriculum and instruction. In recent years, the schools have implemented new curriculum in reading, math, science, engineering, and social/emotional health, and the new curriculum requires longer blocks of uninterrupted instructional time. There is simply not enough time for students to explore and immerse themselves in these core areas of study. When students are highly engaged in an activity, teachers have limited flexibility to extend lesson time and capitalize on teachable moments. Instead, teachers have to redirect students and transition them to the next activity. The short instructional blocks also limit the ability of teachers to integrate different areas of study into a single lesson, and differentiate for learners who need more challenge or more support.

A related issue is the inefficiency of multiple transitions during the school day. When students move to other classrooms, for PE or library time for example, as much as five to ten minutes is

lost in each transition. With multiple transitions each day, these lost minutes add up to many lost hours over the course of the year.

Also significant, the current school-day schedule offers limited collaboration and planning time for teachers. This time is especially important for the implementation of Common Core Math and Language Arts Standards, and Next Generation Science Standards both now and over the next few years.

How Was The Proposed Schedule Developed?

In 2014, discussions among teachers, parents and administrators at the elementary Site Council meetings focused on how the current school-day schedule limits teachers' ability to implement and differentiate curriculum in effective and innovative ways. These discussions led to the creation of a committee to study and "redesign" the school-day schedule to better support educational programs and goals.

The committee studied various schedule options, consulted with experts, solicited and incorporated feedback from parents and teachers, and developed a series of iterative proposals for a new school-day schedule. The proposals were presented at faculty, parent club, site council and Board of Education meetings and parent engagement nights throughout this school year, and refinements were made based on the input received.

A similar, multi-year, iterative process was used recently to change and refine the school day schedule at both the middle and high school. Both the middle and high school changed their block schedules and the start and end times of the school day to better meet student needs and to adapt to new curricular demands, particularly in math and science.

Are There Any State Requirements Governing How The School Day Is Organized?

No. Each school district has discretion to develop a schedule that best serves the needs of its students and best supports the instructional program.

What Are the Goals of the Proposal Schedule?

The proposed schedule is designed to:

- Create longer uninterrupted blocks of instructional time that are developmentally appropriate for each grade level, with fewer transitions that disrupt the flow of teaching and learning.
- Promote opportunities for students to immerse themselves in material, seek greater depth of knowledge, and explore the connections among different areas of study through integrated learning.
- Support the whole student with a balance of academic, creative and social/emotional programs.

- Increase opportunities for teachers to collaborate with grade-level teams, specialists, enrichment teachers and support staff, helping to ensure consistent experiences for students.

To achieve these goals, there would be changes in scheduling of subjects outside the areas of core instruction, and this has sparked some controversy in the community. Nonetheless, there is strong consensus among the administrators, teachers and parents who participated in the redesign process that the proposed changes are necessary and will result in more benefits and educational opportunities for students. Specifically, teachers would have the flexibility to schedule art, technology and library time to “integrate” these disciplines into and augment other curriculum.

The need to change the schedule in order to support this kind of educational innovation is evident in the ongoing efforts to integrate lessons despite current scheduling constraints. For example, all 4th graders are studying the Gold Rush by reading and writing about this and producing *Gold Rush -- The Musical*. The students are creating art for the set, designing costumes, and writing songs, both during class time and at lunch and recess. The current schedule is simply not conducive to this kind of interdisciplinary project.

Another example of how the current schedule does not support integrated teaching and learning is the 2nd grade bread unit at Havens. This is a very successful interdisciplinary project, incorporating social studies, science, math, reading, writing, and art, yet it requires a disruption of the school schedule to make it work. The proposed schedule change would support these kinds of projects, which would become more common, and students would benefit from these rich educational opportunities.

How Would The Proposed Changes Affect Art Instruction?

Currently, there is a disparity in art education among the three elementary schools. Havens has 18 class sessions per year, Beach has 24, and Wildwood has 30. Sessions are typically 60 minutes for the older grades and range from 30 to 60 minutes in the lower grades.

Under the proposal, students at all three schools would receive 24 class sessions of art per year:

- **Kindergarten** would have 24 30-minute sessions, totaling 12 hours of time with the art teacher. Eighteen of these sessions would be in the art room and built into the classroom teacher’s prep schedule. The other six sessions would be arranged by the art teacher in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Recognizing space constraints can at times interfere, the vision is for these additional sessions to also be taught in the art room.
- Students in **Grades 1-3** would have 24 40-minute sessions, totaling 16 hours of time with the art teacher. Eighteen of these sessions would be in the art room and built into

the classroom teacher's prep schedule. The other six sessions would be arranged by the art teacher in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Recognizing space constraints can at times interfere, the vision is for these additional sessions to also be taught in the art room.

- Students in **Grades 4-5** would have 24 50-minute sessions, totaling 20 hours of time with the art teacher. Eighteen of these sessions would be in the art room and built into the classroom teacher's prep schedule. The other six sessions would be arranged by the art teacher in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Recognizing space constraints can at times interfere, the vision is for these additional sessions to also be taught in the art room.

(A brief comparison of the hours of current art classes and the proposed changes follows.)

These 24 sessions of dedicated art time would be supplemented by art integration in the core subjects as well as media arts integration in technology and core subjects.

Art instruction would also change due to the addition of a credentialed art teacher. Currently, art is the only content area in Piedmont Unified taught by uncredentialed personnel. Under the proposal, art would be taught by credentialed teachers, as recommended by both the California Department of Education and the National Art Education Association:

The visual arts in Pre-K through 12 school settings should be taught by certified/licensed and highly qualified art educators. . . . Certified/Licensed and highly qualified visual art educators should: Have a thorough understanding of the visual arts including history, studio skills, art criticism, aesthetics, and the study of visual art and cultures. Have a knowledge of teaching methodologies and how to apply them to the visual arts classroom. Have an ongoing understanding of and ability to integrate current and emerging technology into their teaching. Understand students as learners, including diverse characteristics, abilities, and learning styles. Help students understand the ways in which the arts make meaning, connect with the entire curriculum, and prepare students for success in school, work, and life. Pursue ongoing professional development to support their continuous improvement in both teaching and the arts.

As discussed above, the proposed schedule would offer greater opportunities for integrating art into core curriculum.

Currently, because of how art is staffed, the classroom teachers are legally required to remain in the room during art lessons. Because classroom teachers would no longer be required to attend art classes, these teachers would gain additional preparation and planning time.

Has a credentialed art teacher reviewed the current plan to provide feedback?

Yes. The design team has been in frequent conversations with certificated art teachers to provide additional feedback on art instruction and art integration. One of the recommendations received was to balance standards-based skill development and creative exploration during art instructional time with a credentialed art teacher. A second recommendation was to allow for flexibility concerning sequencing of art sessions, clustering multiple art sessions over one or two or three weeks, rather than limiting art to a rigid schedule of art classes alternating by week. The additional six sessions, also with a credentialed art teacher, will be flexibly scheduled and allow classroom and art teachers to use their jointly-planned sessions to work on an art project two or three school days in a row if the project necessitates.

How Would The Proposed Changes Affect Music Instruction?

Currently, Piedmont Unified offers both vocal and instrumental music instruction in 4th grade, but instrumental music only in 5th grade. Under the proposal, 5th graders would have both vocal and instrumental music. Over the course of each student's K-5 experience students will have the same amount of instrumental music as they currently have. Piedmont Unified is considering starting the school day at 8:00 am on certain days for 4th and 5th grade students taking instrumental music. These students would have one early start day per week and schedules would be coordinated with the Piedmont Language School to avoid any conflicts.

How Would The Proposed Changes Affect Tech Instruction?

At each of the three elementary schools, all 4th and 5th graders now have chromebooks in their classrooms. This makes it possible for their teachers to integrate technology in classroom activities: students are developing skills such as word processing (including copy/paste, formatting, margins/tabs, header/footers, bullets, thesaurus and other functions), online research, media arts, and presentation of work (slideshows, powerpoint), while also learning content. For this reason, dedicated tech time would decrease. Nonetheless, for tech integration to be most effective, and for students to become ethical, efficient, and reflective users of technology, students need a foundation in computer science and digital citizenship. Under the proposal, weekly instruction by a tech specialist would ensure that these important skills are introduced systematically.

How Would the Proposed Changes Affect Library Instruction?

Next year, each of the three elementary schools will be piloting new approaches to using the resources their libraries have to offer. We will be maintaining our traditional library program while also ensuring time for a library commons model. In addition to scheduled class time in the library, teachers will have opportunities to schedule into the library so students can develop their research skills and integrate library resources in their projects. An example of how students are already making greater use of the library, outside of scheduled library time, is the 3rd grade animal adaptation project where students spend additional time in the library to learn research

skills and conduct research with the guidance of our teacher librarians. This combination of fixed and flexible library time serves our evolving curricular needs and gives classroom teachers flexibility concerning how best to incorporate library curriculum into core curriculum.

When Would the Proposed Changes Be Implemented?

If approved by the Board, the changes would be implemented in the 2016/17 school year and refined over the next several years.

Whenever we make changes to improve the education of students, we are building toward our goals with iteration and refinement. We teach, reflect, iterate, and then teach some more. A recent example is how we implemented Bridges and Number Corner this year. The implementation of Bridges will be improved upon next year--streamlining lessons, extending learning activities, supplementing enrichment lessons as needed. It is important to recognize that it can take a few years to fully implement new curriculum and new initiatives. This new school day schedule will strengthen our ability to accomplish all of our educational goals.

Plans are already underway to work with an arts integration specialist and consult with teachers and administrators at other schools to adopt prevailing “best practices.”

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A brief comparison of the current schedule and the proposed schedule follows. Please see the section titled *How Would The Proposed Changes Affect Art Instruction?* to get an understanding of how class sessions translates into precise time. This comparison is in hours and does not account for minor variations among teachers and grade levels:

	Kindergarten	Grades 1-3	Grades 4-5
2015-16			
Art	Havens - 18 Beach - 24 Wildwood - 24	Havens - 18 Beach - 24 Wildwood - 30	Havens - 18 Beach - 24 Wildwood - 30
Tech	N/A	36	36
Library	18	18	18
Vocal Music	18	18	18
Instrumental Music	N/A	N/A	4th: 18 5th: 36
PE	36	54	54

Proposed 2016-17			
Art	12	16	20
Tech	N/A	24	30
Library	18	12 (not including flexible Library Commons time)	15 (not including flexible Library Commons time)
Vocal Music	9	12	15
Instrumental Music	N/A	N/A	27
PE	36	60	60

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The proposed changes in the elementary school day are designed to support curricular needs and offer more benefits and educational opportunities for students.

If you have questions or comments about the elementary school day schedule, please contact the elementary site principals:

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