

Calendar & Block Scheduling FAQ

February 11, 2019

Why was the calendar shifted to an earlier start this year?

Our high school operates on a block schedule, offering a number of great educational benefits to our high school students (see next section). High school courses last a single semester, much like college courses. A committee reviewed how block scheduling impacts the school calendar, and the district moved the start date earlier for a number of related reasons:

- Instructional time available before high-stakes End-of-Course tests, scheduled by the State of Ohio in November, was severely limited when students had a first-semester course. The earlier start better balances instructional time before these tests, which now provide **required points for graduation**, for both semesters.
- State tests measure mastery of state-established standards. We consider those standards a minimum for our students. Teachers cover those standards and more, and they give final exams to measure the complete range of instruction covered in class. When a long break, like winter break, occurs mid-quarter, it can throw a real curve into teaching and learning. We know that this past December, high schoolers appreciated having a REAL break from homework and study, rather than worrying about coming back to final exams on material they hadn't seen in weeks.

What are the benefits of a high school block schedule?

- Longer periods (90 minutes) allow for deeper teaching and learning. This allows our educators to differentiate and personalize learning (inquiry-based lessons, cooperative group learning, & student-centered experiences).
- Students focus on five classes compared to seven. They can prioritize their time and give more attention to their studying and preparation.
- Teachers benefit from this schedule because there is more time for teaching with fewer class transitions. Traditional schedules with class changes each hour or less add "travel time" to the student day at the expense of instructional time.
- Teachers have fewer preparations and more time to plan for courses.
- Class sizes can be lower with block scheduling.
- There is more time for teachers and students to build rapport. Longer, uninterrupted time helps teachers differentiate instruction for their students.
- Curriculum is more in-depth and less fragmented, making learning easier.
- Discipline improves because teachers know their students better. Less hallway transition time also decreases disruptions.
- Less teacher time for administrative duties, such as attendance, allows more quality teaching time.
- Students have twice as many opportunities to earn credit toward graduation. It allows Bay High to require 28 graduation credits (Ohio requires 20). Students experience a rich immersion in learning for all four years of high school, eliminating a "light" senior year.
- Students have more time during a class period to take assessments. This additional time helps students make accurate choices or extend written answers.
- All students have a Quality Resource Period (QRP) to tutor with teachers, study in the media center, or study with peers.

Why do the elementary schools have to start at the same time if they do not have block scheduling?

There are several good reasons to keep our K-12 grades on the same academic calendar:

- An earlier start gives third-grade students extra time before state reading tests in October to recover from the "summer slide" that is so well documented in education literature. These test scores do not only affect our district report card rankings (an important reflection on our community); they are integral to student grade-level advancement under the "third-grade reading guarantee" passed by our legislature.
- Significant difficulty in organizing professional learning or common end-of-quarter marking days across the district could have an adverse affect on our educational program. District initiatives that require all staff to participate become harder to implement.
- Student attendance data impacts our funding, and we must meet minimum hours of attendance requirements. If elementary staff and students start school later, then they would have to work longer into the summer. We believe we would see lowered attendance of students in families affected by varying schedules.
- Varying starting and ending dates for school could cause daycare difficulties for families having different days off across grade bands. Older siblings are often counted upon during summer months and vacation breaks to help out in families where working parents do not have a schedule that coincides with our academic calendar.

There was a survey completed a few years ago and many families want to begin after Labor Day and finish before Memorial Day. Why did we not follow that request?

Survey results did drive a later August start for the year following the survey, as we went from a start date of August 20 in 2015 to a start date of August 29 in 2016-17. However, Ohio's change to make End-of-Course exams count toward graduation requirements changed the urgency around offering more instruction to help students be successful in those first-semester state assessments.

Wouldn't we save money if the schools are closed more during the summer months?

If we did, the savings would be minimal because our schools are open most of the summer for summer enrichment programs, preparing for fall sports and several facility projects.

The 2020-21 calendar starts a little later and ends by Memorial Day -- how was that accomplished?

The district maintained a fall break, winter break, and spring break throughout the year, but shortened the two-week winter break to ten days. We are able to provide breaks throughout the year which we believe helps refresh staff, students and families (but finish by Memorial Day). Academic learning, if students attend only a few days in June after the Memorial Day weekend, is often not as effective.

Why have students return in August and experience more heat issues?

During our extensive facilities upgrades provided by voter approval of a 2012 bond issue, significant improvements were made to install air-conditioning across all our classrooms. Most common areas are also air-conditioned, except at Normandy and Westerly. Our five-year facilities plan includes adding cooling coils to the Normandy and Westerly multi-purpose rooms.

Furthermore, while our buses are not air-conditioned, our routes average about 15 minutes due to our compact five-mile area. Windows and roof vents help keep our bus interiors more comfortable for shorter rides.

Is this decision unique to Bay?

Yes and no.

Yes -- because Bay is one of few districts who have block scheduling. We believe, however, that the high school schedule sets our students up for more learning opportunities and preparation for post-secondary opportunities.

No -- because the majority of districts in Cuyahoga County are following national trends by starting school earlier.