

Austin Elementary Enjoys Balanced-Day Benefits

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Kim Young (submitted photo)

Austin Elementary School has been operating on a balanced-day school system for quite some time, and everyone from parents to staff and students are gaining from its many benefits.

"The balanced school day is just a timetable," says administrator Kim Young. "It's a little different from the traditional school schedule that most of us would have grown up with. It consists of three 100-minute teaching blocks separated by two nutrition breaks. And the nutrition breaks allow the students to eat a healthy meal or snack, and then be active during a traditional recess."

She says the length of the school day remains unchanged, with the same start and end times, but the schedule is broken up in a different manner.

Young notes among the many benefits include more uninterrupted instruction time for the younger students. Three learning periods of 100 minutes each are divided by a nutrition break.

Young explains the school starts with 15 minutes of physical activity for all students. Then the 100-minute learning periods begin, followed by a nutrition break, and then another 100 minutes, a nutrition break, followed by the last 100 minutes of the day. She notes it's more of an enhanced learning environment now with fewer interruptions, more structured instruction time for students, and improved student concentration and energy levels, especially due to the 15 minutes of exercise at the start.

Young says it's an all-around improvement for student achievement and health as well as for staff. She notes staff appreciate it due to the longer period of recess time that allows for more preparatory work for their next classes.

When younger students are getting dressed to go outside, and remove winter wear to come back in for a traditional 15-minute recess, Young explains you're losing time. This makes the 15 minutes turn into only seven minutes for the kids outside. With the 30-minute recess in the new system, by the time kids go outside they still have a substantial amount of time to enjoy a physically active recess.

She says parents noticed the kids aren't coming home as hungry as they had been under the old system, as well. They eat at 10:40 a.m., and whatever isn't finished can be eaten at the 1:00 p.m. nutrition break. They're also offering a canteen in the morning, and a hot meal at the school every Friday. Every other Wednesday there's a full school breakfast.