

Early school dismissals

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Teachers, administrator discuss value of 1:30 p.m.dismissal.

Elementary students may dash out the door early on certain Wednesdays to go to the park or play with friends.

Their older counterparts may drive downtown for a refreshment before returning to Gothenburg Public School for extracurricular activities.

However monthly early outs—when classes are dismissed at 1:30 p.m.—don't mean teachers and administrators leave the building.

For Jonathan Meyer, the two-hour time slot gives him the opportunity to work in his Dudley Elementary sixth-grade classroom, prepare lessons with others who teach the grade or attend staff meetings.

Without planning periods, several teachers said the time gives them a needed chance to communicate with each other, especially since many are involved coaching extracurricular activities after school.

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Second-grade teacher Justin Dowdy said early outs allow him to work on special units with other teachers.

For example, second-grade teachers planned activities they did around Thanksgiving.

“Sometimes it’s just sitting down and making sure we’re on the same page,” Dowdy said.

Dudley physical education teacher Dan Yilk said he and other physical education teachers planned a new curriculum during early outs that was recently approved by the District 20 school board.

During an early dismissal on Dec. 8, science teachers met to discuss curriculum at a meeting led by junior high principal Ryan Groene, who is also curriculum director.

Students are gearing up to take a statewide NsEA science test in the spring. As a result, science curriculum is being realigned and a new class added.

Junior high science teacher Cindy Moore said teachers use early dismissal time to insure they teach the same concepts so lessons aren’t repeated or material left out.

“They’re very valuable,” Moore said. “It’s a break from having students, but not from work, because we don’t leave any earlier.”

Moore pointed out that the time is helpful because of more state requirements that teachers must meet.

Because not all children learn the same way, high school biology teacher Maggie Tiller said teachers must develop lessons that are taught in multiple ways so all students understand.

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Learning new technology also takes time.

“I am always trying to develop new labs and activities for students to be able to experience concepts first hand,” Tiller explained. “Developing those labs, testing those labs, and then organizing those labs also takes time.”

Tiller has also collaborated with other teachers, like English teacher Roxanne Whiting, on a project students completed for both classes.

First-grade teacher Michelle Stienike said special education teachers sometimes use early-out time to meet with classroom teachers and plan what is needed for students.

“It allows us to enhance our teaching strategies and share ideas,” Stienike said.

Although arranging places for students to go after school on early-out days is sometimes inconvenient for parents who work outside the home, Stienike said it helps teachers to be better and more prepared.

Kindergarten teacher April Graham described early dismissal as a time teachers “can feed off of each other.”

Where Graham used to teach, at Bow Valley East Catholic in Hartington, teachers had a full day monthly to plan curriculum and have in-services.

Christy Lecher, who teaches science and math to fifth and sixth graders, said the time is especially important for her to meet with other teachers.

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“That’s because I’m a share teacher between two grades,” Lecher said. “Otherwise, it’s hard for me to meet with teachers.”

Some people may think early dismissals encourage students to roam around town but in the long run, Tiller said the learning environment is improved.

“Students then benefit,” she said.

According to www.teacher

vision.fen.com, Tiller said the average classroom teacher makes more than 1,500 educational decisions each school day.

In an average six-hour day, she said that’s more than four decisions every minute.

With 15-25 students cycling into and out of her classroom every 48 minutes, Tiller said there’s not much

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