

Later Start Time

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention all recommend that the school day start at 8:30 a.m. or later for middle and high school students. Later start times are more in sync with natural sleep patterns of teenagers. This research is not new, it has been around for decades. But the priorities and realities of bus schedules, sports practices and school rituals have presented challenges to change. Research clearly shows a wide variety of academic benefits (better grades, better attendance) and health benefits (more and better quality of sleep, lower rates of obesity, reduction of depression, anxiety, and drug use) for students who attend schools with later start times.

Structured Times for Extracurricular Activities

The majority of club, honor society, and leadership group meetings occur after school, scattered throughout the week. For many students, this is problematic because the meetings often conflict with student athletic events and transportation arrangements. By adding a Zero Block, we are shifting club activities from after school to before school to alleviate conflicts and create more balance in the students' day. All clubs and activities will be on a two-week rotation on Tuesdays and Thursdays, allowing every club to meet twice a month. Clubs will be organized into A, B, C, and D schedules, so that a student can participate in up to four clubs without a scheduling conflict. On Wednesdays and Fridays, teachers will hold office hours to see students and provide tutoring as needed. Monday Zero Blocks will be scheduled for faculty activities such as Department Chair, IB Team, and grade-level meetings.

Make Time for Daily Prayer and Reflection

Faith formation is a core value of our Ursuline tradition and of our mission as a Catholic school. In addition to our current practice of beginning and ending the day and each class with prayer, we have set aside time in the middle of the day to pause as a community to pray individually and to reflect on how we can be better disciples of Christ.

Reduce the Frenetic Pace of the Days

As part of our research, we met with student leaders to gauge the student perspective on our current and past bell schedules. Through these discussions, students repeatedly communicated that two of this year's modifications (longer pass times between classes and longer lunch periods) greatly helped reduce stress and improved the overall pace of the day. As a result, the new schedule maintains the 10-minute pass times between classes and extended lunchtimes.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is attendance during Zero Block mandatory for students?

No. Zero Block is a scheduled time for optional student activities and teacher office hours. Students who participate in clubs and activities will be required to attend scheduled meetings during these times, but if a student isn't scheduled for any group during a specific Zero Block, they do not need to be at school. Attendance will be taken at 8:30 a.m. each day.

Will faculty and administration be available during Zero Block?

Yes. The required workday will not change for faculty and administration. Faculty will be at school each day from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Teachers will be available to see students every Wednesday and Friday during Zero Block and on Tuesdays and Thursdays if they do not have a club meeting.

I noticed there is no longer a homeroom?

Correct. In our discussions with faculty and students, it became clear that homeroom was not an effective use of people's time. By eliminating homeroom, we were able to push the start time of classes back to 8:30 a.m., to allow students more time to sleep, if they don't need to attend a Zero Block.

How does this affect parent drop-off and pick-up times?

The answer is up to individual students and families. The building hours will remain the same, and students are free to be dropped off at school whenever it best fits their needs. If a student has a Zero Block at 7:45 a.m., they may need to arrive slightly earlier than their usual time now, depending on when that is. If they are not participating in a Zero Block, they can arrive 30 minutes later than their current routine, with classes beginning at 8:30 a.m. The school day will end at 3:05 p.m., just five minutes later than our current schedule.

What about lunch?

Lunch periods will largely return to the approach we used in previous years. We will have two 30-minute lunch periods a day at the beginning and the end of Blocks 3 and 7.