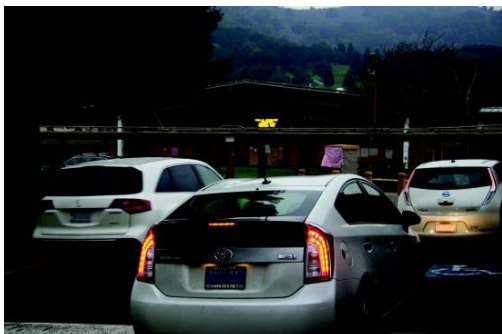


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AUHSD to implement new block schedule for schools

By Sora O'Doherty



The Miramonte parking lot at rush hour. Photo Sora O'Doherty

If you are noticing less rush in the Lamorinda rush hour this week, it might be due to the one-week trial of the new block schedule at all four high schools in the Acalanes Union High School District. The block schedule, which will be brought into all AUHSD high schools next fall, is being given a test drive from Feb. 6 through Feb. 10.

On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, students will not begin class until 8:35 a.m. This will give them an opportunity for a little extra sleep, which had been shown to be beneficial to adolescents. Their teachers, however, will still be hard at work from 7:30 a.m., using the time for both professional development and collaborative work. And an extra bonus may be rush hour traffic relief for everyone.

The main impetus for the change in schedule is California's new standards, which, according to Miramonte Principal Julie Parks, really lend themselves into deeper dives into curriculum. This new reality in learning makes it necessary to shift instructional practices. The block schedule, which features longer class periods three days per week, incorporate more technical and project-based learning.

"Project-based learning," Parks explained, is catch phrase for different ways of assessing student learning. A project allows students to combine different instructional areas, and assessments are not multiple choice. Longer instructional blocks enable the schools to do this more effectively.

The schools have been working towards implementation of the block schedule for a long time. All last year literally hundreds of hours were spent in preparation, including visiting schools with different types of block schedules. Here is what AUHSD block schedule will be like:

Each Monday will be "anchor day." Starting at 8:35 a.m. and ending at 3:05 p.m., students will have all their seven classes, each for 45 minutes.

Tuesdays and Thursdays are "block days," with students having 90-minute blocks of their first, second, fifth and sixth periods. The passing periods in between classes are being lengthened from five to 10 minutes. Block days start at 8 a.m.

Wednesdays and Fridays are "academy days." Starting at 8:35 a.m., students will have their third, fourth, and seventh period block classes, plus a 55-minute "academy period" embedded in midmorning. This time is envisioned as a flexible time when students will have some choices, perhaps some extra help or intervention for students who may be struggling, or additional enrichment for those who require more of a challenge. Other students will be able to avail of some time to get their work done, collaborate with others or meet with teachers.

During this pilot week there will not be full implementation of academy days.

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