

Dear ANCS Community,

Providing students with deep, meaningful learning through exploration and inquiry is the core of the educational program at ANCS. Our own assessments and the feedback we've received from students and parents indicates that we are fairly successful in carrying out this work, with well over 90% of students and parents responding on recent surveys that they were happy with the ANCS experience and students were engaged in meaningful learning. Yet sustaining this approach demands lots of time for teachers and staff to collaborate together for the creative process of developing curriculum, assessing projects, and personalizing learning for students, time that currently is only about 10-15% of a teacher's stated work week. A recent survey of our faculty and staff showed that over 50% do not feel they have enough time to effectively collaborate with their colleagues. Coupled with increasing accountability requirements because of changes to state law, there is a heightened need to configure our calendar and schedule to provide for more and better collaboration time for teachers and staff so that we may create the best school possible for our students—all of which is why this is an area of focus in the school's recently-approved strategic plan.

Some of you may know that the school's leadership team and governing board explored this topic last year. We learned that in considering changes to the use of time in our calendar and schedule we first need to provide opportunities for input and discussion among the full community of parents and faculty/staff before final decisions are made. A small task force was formed by the board in the spring, and, in consultation with the school's leadership team, the task force is bringing forward **a proposal for the 2015-16 school year to increase teacher and staff collaboration time through adjustments to the calendar and schedule**. The proposal along with different ways you can get more information and provide input are below. Please take some time to carefully read it. **The leadership team and task force will review input from parents and from teachers and staff about the proposal before bringing a recommendation for the 2015-16 calendar and schedule before the school's governing board at its December meeting for a vote.**

Sincerely,

[Matt Underwood](#)
Executive Director

[Greg Parent](#)
ANCS Governing Board Member and Calendar/Schedule Task Force Chair

Proposal to increase teacher and staff collaboration time - 2015-16 school year

Purpose:

To align school calendar and schedule with teacher and staff collaboration time needed for enhanced student outcomes

Why is increased teacher and staff collaboration time needed?

Reasons why regular, consistent collaboration time among the full faculty and staff is needed include:

- the demands of learning about and implementing new Common Core standards;
- complicated new school accountability requirements to which our school is held;
- curriculum is planned by teachers around creative projects that cut across disciplines rather than relying on simple, superficial textbooks;
- to provide high levels of feedback and information for students and parents—through blogs, narrative report cards, conferences;
- there is a higher percentage of students with special needs at ANCS than most other schools which requires more training and more time in which teachers are involved in SST and IEP meetings;
- K-8 alignment—educationally and operationally—across two separate campuses; and
- sustaining a healthy and engaged faculty and staff so we can retain great teachers for many years of work with our students.

How will increased teacher and staff collaboration time be used to improve student outcomes?

Some examples of how this regular collaboration time would be used to improve student outcomes:

- looking together at student work to norm what “meeting” and “exceeding” the standards looks like in different skills at each grade level
- analyzing schoolwide and grade-level student assessment data to identify students in need of support and challenge
- taking part in professional workshops on areas of schoolwide learning (such as Conscious Discipline, meeting the needs of academically advanced students) to insure consistency across the school
- conferencing with other teachers about individual students
- receiving training in critical areas of compliance (special education, allergy management, emergency protocols, mandated reporter, CPR) so that a safe and supportive environment exists for all students

What are the proposed ways to create increased time for teacher and staff collaboration?

In order to gain regular and sufficient collaboration time, on one day each week school is in session, the regular school day would end and students would be dismissed earlier—at 1:30 PM at the elementary campus and at 2:15 PM at the middle campus. This is an approach several other charter and traditional schools locally and nationally use to schedule collaboration time for their professional staffs, including our middle school campus since 2008. We propose making this structure consistent across both campuses.

On this day each week, teachers and staff would be engaged in activities such as those described above for approximately 2.5 hours. For students, regular ANCS after care would be available immediately after dismissal until its regular end time at the same daily rate as all other days of the week and with scholarships available for families who need them. Other after care programs that pick up from ANCS—such as the Boys and Girls Club—would pick students up at this earlier dismissal time.

The proposed day for this earlier student dismissal for teacher and staff collaboration time is Wednesday. Why Wednesdays? The school's leadership team—made up of the Executive Director, Principals and Assistant Principals, Director of Business & Operations, Special Education Coordinator, and Director of Collaborative Learning & Partnerships—sees Wednesdays as the best day to engage in professional learning and collaboration away from the busy-ness that comes with the start and end of each week. Wednesdays also allow teachers and staff to address and adjust to school issues that unexpectedly arise early in the week or will be coming later in the week. The leadership team realizes that, for some families, Friday might be a preferable day for a weekly earlier dismissal time. The leadership team does not see Fridays as the ideal day for several reasons. Several Fridays throughout the year would be lost due to school holidays, and scheduling the most creative, collaborative work for the final hours of the day at the end of a work week does not seem like it would be productive in any profession. As well, many student activities—in particular, nearly all athletics games—occur on Friday afternoon and evenings, which would make an earlier dismissal and extended block of collaboration time logistically challenging for many. However, knowing all of this, we are open to your feedback on this proposed day.

Although students at ANCS are already in school approximately 1-3 hours more each week than most other area elementary and middle schools, we heard in feedback from many last spring that it is important to maintain a high level of in-class time for students. Therefore, this proposal includes potentially adding two school days to the 2015-16 calendar to compensate for the weekly early dismissal day. With a commitment to keeping the ANCS calendar as aligned as possible with the calendar for the Atlanta Public Schools, the options for where to add two days to the school calendar are:

- August 3rd and 4th (starting school two days earlier than APS calendar)
- October 8th and February 16th (fall and mid-winter breaks each one day shorter than APS calendar)
- November 23rd and 24th (Thanksgiving week break two days shorter than APS calendar)
- May 26th and 27th (ending school two days later than APS calendar)

How can I ask questions or give input about this proposal?

There are several opportunities to ask questions and/or give your input on this proposal:

- 1) Short survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/parents_Nov14
- 2) Open listening sessions:
 - Wednesday, December 3rd from 7-8 PM in middle campus library
 - Friday, December 5th from 8:15-9:15 AM in elementary campus cafeteria