

April 24, 2012

The loss of hours over the past few years, including the loss of early dismissal time has had a significant impact on para-educators throughout the district.

Since we are not allowed hours when students are not present, we are no longer included in Building or Departmental Staff meetings. This results in a lack of communication, coordination and feeling disconnected from certificated staff.

At Bainbridge High School our work hours remain the same but the school start and end times have been increased by 5 minutes at each end so we have almost no preparation time at the start of the day or de-brief time at the end of the day.

With the emphasis on being with students every minute of the day, we also have very little planning or communication time with our certificated supervisors. All these functions have to be done "on the fly", during breaks, over lunch, or (worst case scenario) on our own time, before or after school. Despite warnings not to work unpaid hours, I know many paras are guilty of doing this -- skipping breaks, working through lunch, taking time before or after school to make sure their students receive the best instruction and reviewing and responding to e-mails from home.

The impact on students is significant. At BHS, we had only 90 minutes preparation time at the start of this school year. Consequently, the review of our schedule and each student's IEP, goals, limitations and appropriate learning strategies is necessarily fairly shallow. The cut-backs in hours over the rest of the year mean that consultation and coordination time is at a premium. Discussions of the details of student behavior, appropriate goals and responding to various challenges tend to be somewhat hit-and-miss. Both certificated and classified staff are trying their best under trying circumstances but, with these recent limitations, a decline in service to our students is unavoidable.

Further cuts would undoubtedly further compromise the quality of the education our Special Education students receive.

.....Mike McCloud