

Early Release Wednesdays and UbD

1. When will early release Wednesdays begin?

Wednesday, August 19, the second week of school.

2. What is the purpose of Early Release Wednesdays?

Early release Wednesdays will provide important opportunity for teachers to engage in professional learning and collaborative and individual planning. This time is valuable, as it will support school and district efforts to continuously improve teaching and learning for all children.

3. How often will teachers be required to participate in site-based professional development on Early Release Wednesdays?

Principals may schedule professional development on one Early Release Wednesday per month. Principals will provide teachers with a schedule for professional development during preplanning. Professional development activities on Early Release Wednesdays will be guided by the school improvement plan and the professional learning needs of the teachers at the school.

4. Will teachers be allowed to use compensatory time on Early Release Wednesdays?

No, this time is protected time for planning and professional learning; teachers should avoid scheduling non-emergency appointments on Early Release Wednesdays.

5. Will coaches and sponsors be permitted to start practices or hold meetings on Early Release Wednesdays?

Coaches and sponsors will be permitted to start practices or hold meetings on Early Release Wednesdays that have not been designated for professional development, with the understanding that the teacher's primary role is high quality instruction, and it will be their responsibility to devote the necessary time for effective planning and collaboration with colleagues.

6. Will secondary schools have to modify schedules in order to satisfy state requirements for earning of credits?

High schools must provide for 67.5 hours of instruction per class in order to award credit each semester. The first semester of 2015-2016 is 87 days, which will require a minimum of 49 minutes on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, and 37 minutes on Wednesdays, with a two hour exam period in December. Schools may adjust time between classes or lunch schedules to accommodate this requirement or work with their Area Superintendent and Transportation to determine if minor adjustments to the start and end times of the school day may be arranged.

7. What arrangements for School-Aged Child Care or secondary student supervision will be made to accommodate Early Release Wednesdays?

Staffing hours for School-Aged Child Care will be adjusted to accommodate the increased need for elementary school supervision at the close of the student day. Secondary schools may implement study halls supervised by community coaches with the appropriate security clearances or set up rotations among willing staff members willing to supervise students remaining on campus for extracurricular activities.

8. Are teachers required to remain on campus for planning on Early Release Wednesdays?

Yes, it is expected that planning will be done at the worksite on Early Release Wednesdays. Teachers will choose to engage in collaborative planning with their peers or plan individually, as needed. Single teachers who wish to engage in collaborative planning with peers in the same subject area at other schools may make arrangements with their principal.

9. What is 'Understanding by Design' and what will be required of teachers in year one, 2015-2016?

Understanding by Design is a research-based planning process, not a district-mandated lesson plan template.

There are three stages:

Step one focuses on the standard, what it is that kids should know and be able to do;

Step two focuses on the evidence, what it will look like when students have mastered the standard, or how a teacher will know that a student has not mastered the standard and needs additional support; and

Step three focuses on the learning activities, what instructional strategies teachers will use to teach the standard to its fullest intent.

A volunteer team of teachers will develop and teach a UbD unit lesson plan between August and October, to share with colleagues at the October PD day or in early release professional development. All teachers will be expected to develop and teach one UbD unit lesson between October and February, collaboratively or individually (up to the teacher) to share with peers at the February PD day.

10. Why is the district implementing 'another thing' -- Understanding by Design -- when teachers already feel overwhelmed?

UbD is not 'another thing'. UbD is a more efficient way to plan and to use professional learning communities more effectively. In addition, the language in Dimension One of IPPAS aligns with the language in UbD, as does the training you've received in B.E.S.T. and other school and site-based initiatives such as Literacy Design Collaborative, Dr. Max Thompson and Learning Focused, and others. Instead of looking at UbD as more work, teachers are encouraged to try it as a different way to work. It complements previous BPS initiatives.

The EDI survey results and comments indicated that teachers enjoy collaboration and common planning but need more time to do it. The survey also indicated that while teachers feel like they understand the new standards, they are not confident that the new standards will prepare our students for colleges and careers, and more demonstrations of the standards through video and peer observation are needed to help teachers reach the appropriate level of rigor. Finally, a TNTP research project conducted observations in 4 Florida districts during the 2014-2015 school year, and observed the instructional shifts necessary to meet the rigor of the new standards in only 7% of the classrooms observed. The need for a better way to plan in order to meet the district mission of serving all children with excellence was evident in these data.