IES Institute of Education Sciences

STUDY SNAPSHOT
July 2020

Regional Educational Laboratory Central
At Marzano Research

How Legacy High School Students Use Their Flexible Time

There is growing attention to personalizing education to provide students with more flexibility in their education experiences and more time to master academic content.[1] To personalize education, Legacy High School in Bismarck Public Schools, North Dakota, has implemented a schedule that allows students to choose how they use a portion of the school day outside of their regularly scheduled classes. Students can use this flexible time, called flex-time, visiting one of the school's content-specific learning centers, working alone or with classmates on school projects, or relaxing with friends. Teachers may also determine how students use some of their flex-time, when necessary. Leaders at Legacy High School and Bismarck Public Schools partnered with the Regional Educational Laboratory Central to examine how students used their flex-time and whether students with different demographic characteristics and academic achievement levels used their flex-time differently.

Key findings

- *Students had an average of 80 minutes a day of flex-time and chose to use 19 percent of it for academic activities.* Students chose how to use 97 percent of their flex-time, on average, whereas teachers determined how students would use an average of 3 percent. When students determined how to use their flex-time, they used a large majority of their total flex-time for nonacademic activities (78 percent). Female students used 21 percent for student-determined academic-focused activities, significantly more than male students did (17 percent).
- *The percentage of flex-time that students chose to spend on academics did not vary by academic achievement level.* Among academic-focused activities, students chose to use 71 percent of their student-determined flex-time for coursework outside of the school's learning centers. When teachers determined how students would use their flex-time, they required students to use most of that time (42 percent) in learning centers, although this requirement made up a very small portion of students' total use of flex-time (1 percent). This finding suggests that the school's learning centers were underused. Legacy High School leaders have indicated a need to better inform teachers and students about the resources that are available in the centers so that students might use the centers more effectively.
- *Students who were struggling academically had more teacher-determined flex-time than other students did and spent less time on coursework outside of the learning centers.* Students who were struggling in both math and reading had more teacher-determined flex-time (9 percent of total flex-time) than did other students (from less than 1 percent to 3 percent). Additionally, struggling students used significantly less of their student-determined academic-focused flex-time for coursework outside of the learning centers (47 percent) than students who were excelling (89 percent) did and significantly more time (31 percent) for "other" academic activities than other students did. There were no significant differences in the percentage of flex-time spent in learning centers between struggling students and other students. Thus, struggling students did not use more flex-time for coursework in or out of the learning centers than other students did, as educators might hope when giving students a choice in how to use some of their time during the school day, which Legacy High School's flexible mod schedule does.

1. Pane, J. F., Steiner, E. D., Baird, M. D., & Hamilton, L. S. (2015). *Continued progress: Promising evidence on personalized learning.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED571009.