

Flexible Learning Environments: Spruce Grove Composite High School

[musical interlude to 00.24]

Chris Shaw, Assistant Principal: Traditional learning takes place between a bell at the beginning of class and a bell at the end of class and that's the way we've set up and that's the way we've designed it.

For flexible learning, I would say to somebody, imagine sitting in a class where you are very very good at it, you had all of the goods, you probably mastered all the outcomes you needed to master half way through, and yet you were required to sit through there until the other bell.

Now, envision on the other side. Imagine that you're in a class where you're feeling overwhelmed, where you're feeling like, I'm not sure I have all of this, and that one sense that if I just had a little bit more time, I could probably master these outcomes, but that final bell rings, and we're done.

Flexibility is about taking that extra time in this particular course where you don't need it and adding it on a different area where you could use the time to be successful.

Haley Sorensen, Teacher: With this flex time, it's really allowed us to say, you know what? It's okay. If we don't get it at the end of the 70-minute block, we can get it today during seminar time; we could get it on Thursday during PLT time. You could come in, you can sit with me, we can go over what you don't understand – or you know what, you don't even have to come in and sit with me. You can go to the teacher across the hall and maybe they can explain it in a different way, but it's okay if you don't get it in a 70-minute block.

Myra Rybotycki, Teacher: Instead of looking at delivery to the whole class, you're looking at delivery to the individual.

Chris Shaw: The student would see periods inserted into a timetable at key points throughout the semester where, on the one hand, when a report card is due or an assessment is due, we would find some time for kids to remediate and enrich, at the end of a month, at the end of a semester, at the end of a year, where they could use that time to [indistinct 1.54] and feel confident going into the final assessments. On a daily basis, that would look like a seminar time, which throughout many of the schools looks different, but for us is manifested in a time at the end of the day where we take 10 minutes off each class and we give it back to the students and we say to them: you are responsible; we have faith in your judgement; where are you going to go to get the help that you need in order to be successful?

Gwen Lundman, Parent: I think the greatest benefit that my child has had in a flexible learning environment is the seminar time at the end of every day. I was a very sceptical parent: I figured out how many minutes my kid lost in the classroom and then I realised that she gained so much more back, because I have a very diligent student and she's a good student, but she could definitely benefit from one-on-one time.

Catie, Student: It shifts the responsibility from the teachers to my hands and I'm now in control of my learning and if there's something that I don't understand, then it's up to me to go and seek the help that I need, but I'm now given an opportunity and an amount of time to

get that help that I need. So there's a certain amount of greater responsibility that comes on me as a student, but it's teaching me those independent and proactive skills that I'm gonna need later on in life.

Alison Normand, Parent and Chair of School Council: It gets them starting to think about what *they* need, or what they feel they need and start, again, taking some responsibility for that, not waiting for the teacher to approach them and say, listen, I think you need some help with this or you're not doing well in that, let's meet and do that. It starts them thinking, geez, what do I need help with, and who do I want to see and when and for how long? And if that timeframe didn't work, well then I'm gonna have to get in touch with that teacher again.

Chris Shaw: The teachers are in their classrooms. The teachers are available. Sometimes students are directed to go, but for the most part, a student recognises, I have an exam this week, I have a major assignment this week – there's something I have to get done. I'm going to use my seminar time and I'm going to self-direct my learning and go where I need to go.

Mitchell, Student: Having the time to take control of my learning and go where I want to go, because the time that we have isn't necessarily allotted to just one subject or one teacher – we can go and see as many or as little teachers as we want, covering all subjects as well.

Myra Rybotycki: As soon as kids can see that they are the drivers in their education, they really have a sense of power over what they're doing, then they're way more inclined to be concerned about their education and really be active participants in it.

Haley Sorensen: We no longer are saying, 'You *have* to know this at the end of the 70 minutes block – see you tomorrow.' We're saying, 'how are you feeling about this concept?' and 'could you come in if you don't get it?' So there's a lot more conversations happening, and they're positive, because the students aren't as panicked. They know that they have this opportunity to come in.

Chris Shaw: Personal learning time, PLT, is a twice-monthly occurrence in which, as opposed to seminar time which is 40 minutes at the end of the day, for us PLT, we take an afternoon. We have a considerable population of our students who certainly work with a lot of [indistinct 4.56] students, and they don't have that flexibility to get together for three or four hours to work collaboratively on a project. As well, we also have a lot of activities where we go off-site [indistinct 5.05] 40-minute seminar [indistinct]. So twice monthly, we give an entire afternoon back to the kids. They still have to be here, still have to be working, but that added time, in an infrequent basis, allows them to go more further in-depth on their assignments, work collaboratively and actually get something done without a bell ringing at the end of the day.

Mitchell, Student: Students like to work in groups and work on group projects as well, so having that time helps to have that group time where instead, if you can't go to someone's house or you can't make the time to do that outside of school, having this flexitime is definitely a bonus.

Audrey Sonnenberg, English Department Head: The students in my classroom come with multiple levels of learning needs and wants and desires and I have learned to accommodate that recognition of those individual learning needs. I think it's made me a better teacher and a more aware teacher and hopefully has assisted the students to become more successful.

Darlene Marcinkevics, Principal: Education isn't just about the student. It needs to be a partnership; it needs to be all stakeholders. Schools who are maybe involved now in high school redesign, they need to be very very clear what their vision, their goal and their purpose are, and then they need to be able to communicate that to parents in a number of ways, making sure that you've gained that trust, that they don't just think this is the flavour of the day – that they understand that as educators, we've done our research and we know that this is good for kids.

Catie, Student: I'm still just as engaged and *just* as optimistic about my learning as I was before – only now I have control over it, so if there's something that I don't like or something that I don't understand, I know have the freedom and the independence to deal with it on my own and I know how, because I've learned to learn this way.

[musical interlude 6.49 to END]

Recording ENDS: 7.07