

This series of resources presents effective practices implemented by some of the 27 schools involved in the original High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (HSFEPP) as they explored ways to use flexibility to increase student engagement and achievement and to support quality teaching in their schools.

This series represents a sampling of the effective practices being implemented in redesign schools across the province.

## FLEX PROGRAM

How can a high school let its students have a controlled way to make choices and start taking responsibility for planning their learning opportunities? How can students responsibly explore learning opportunities beyond the set curriculum, perhaps in preparation for a college or university experience?

### What is a Flex Program?

At Mother Margaret Mary High School in Edmonton, students can use 20 per cent of the school day every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at school as flex time. Students have the option of seeking help for core subjects like math, social studies, science and English language arts, or studying other subjects like band, art, drama, culture, yoga, and even boat safety and culture. For students who really need to catch up, homework can be done during flex time.

A teacher in the school described the program as “an extra block in our schedule that has no set class. The students go on PowerSchool and are given a list of different classes and activities that they have to sign up for during their flex block.” Students register a week in advance for their chosen class.

Students have name tags with bar codes that are scanned going into each class. If a student does not show up for a flex time class, a note goes to their Teacher Advisor (TA) and the TA follows up to ensure the student follows through on the flex time commitment. The school is working on a system that would allow students to post reports and other information through the school’s website.

The timing of the flex block is strategically placed so students take it seriously. On Mondays and Wednesdays, flex time is between Blocks 1 and 2, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, flex time is between Blocks 3 and 4. By not having the flex time at the beginning or end of the day, the flex time is solidly built into the school day.

My daughter’s ability to juggle school work, interests outside of school, family obligations, and a part-time job are a direct result of understanding time management and practicing time management. These skills were enhanced with the flex program.

*Parent of student, Mother Mary Margaret High School*



# Why the school implemented a Flex Program

The Flex Program provides the school with true flexibility. When a teacher needs more time for an in-class assignment such as a lab, she can ask students to sign up for a flex block following the regular class. Classes can be combined to provide longer periods for special program activities. For example, the golf academy instructor, who is also a science teacher, could use the regular 7 a.m. course time, combined with science and flex, to provide extended golf instruction.

Flex time can bring the whole school together: on a professional development day last year teachers came up with the idea of designating a “project week” at the school, so, for example, in December 2013, the flex-week theme was “water”. Every subject area offered a flex option tied to the theme of water.

Kim Brophy, principal of Mother Margaret Mary, notes, “In our school, the flex program is just two years old. We built the program through conversations with parents, and by looking at progressive schools in Alberta, in centres such as Olds, Stettler, and in Edmonton, which has St. Joseph High School. In fact, we hired teachers with the flex program in mind.” It is worth noting that teachers can also use flex time for collaborative sessions. For example, all English teachers can be released from working with students during a flex time to gather and invest in their learning community.

## What the data indicates

For Mother Mary Margaret High School, it is early days. Student-engagement data gathered from the *TELL Them FROM Me* survey last year helped inform the school’s redesign plans and will be used again this year, so the school will have two sources of data.

Anecdotally, students are more engaged. Last year when some students hacked into the school’s website and changed the names of the courses, flex time was cancelled the next day. All students were angry with those who had been suspended for the vandalism. They were angry because there was no yoga, no fitness – none of the flex time choices – and instead they had 83-minute regular blocks.

Another parent stated that the positive outcomes of the flex program include “the following points: keeps my daughter engaged in a positive manner; gives my daughter the option to investigate other interests in addition to the school curriculum; and allows my daughter the time to ask for assistance in core courses”.

## What we learned

Brophy says he is working with “exceptional staff who love working together, and who are compassionate and purposeful.” Flex time allows teachers to display these qualities and engage more deeply with students. One teacher suggested there is no need to change this effective practice. She says, “I believe that the flex block system is fine the way it is at the moment. Hopefully if we get more staff, we can offer more flex blocks, because it feels very limited at the moment.”

For more on Flex Program, contact:

Kim Brophy, Principal

Mother Margaret Mary High School, Edmonton

[www.ecsd.net/schools/1430](http://www.ecsd.net/schools/1430)

**MORE RESOURCES IN THE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES SERIES:** Building Communities in the School · Collaborative Partnerships · Continuous Progress Courses · Flex Block for Course Completion · Focus Blocks · iPLAN · Mastery Learning & Task Design · Ongoing Feedback · Personalized Learning Time · Pods for Learning · Student-Led Conferences · Teacher Advisor · Teacher Advisory Program · Teacher Advisory System · Teacher Collaborative Time · Teacher Professional Planning Time · Team Teaching & Collaboration