

Since last spring, our district leaders, staff and students have been working together to reimagine the high school experience as part of a program called LakotaNEXT. Our goal was to provide more opportunities for Lakota students to personalize their learning and prepare them for the future they envision once they cross the graduation stage.

The group, comprised of teachers and students representing both Lakota West and East, came together to collaborate during the #LakotaNext Design Challenge in November. The challenge revolved around answering the question: How might we design a prototype of a high school master schedule that fosters the core principles of personalized learning?

After listening to the presentations, district leaders took their ideas and created a new schedule for our high schools for the 2019-20 school year. We are excited to announce that, beginning in the fall, students will have the option to take advantage of Lakota's expanding course offerings by extending their day by one period. While students currently have the option to add a seventh bell to the traditional six bell day, "zero period," as it is known, is limited to specific English and social studies courses, and is only offered at 7:15 a.m. Now, in addition to our early start schedule, we will introduce a seventh bell for students who prefer to extend their school day.

The classes offered during both extended periods will be determined by student demand and district resources, a dramatic difference from the limited course offerings of English and social studies currently available during zero bell. Now that our registration period has ended, our counselors and principals will review course requests and determine what classes we will be able to offer during the new zero and seventh bells options.

A more flexible schedule allows our students to have more choice in their classes, and sets the stage for expanded course offerings as we continue to build upon our curriculum. One example is the Lakota Cyber Academy, which will begin in the fall. Together with Cincinnati-based Belcan, we are excited to offer this new pathway to our high school students. In December, we held a parent and student information night with over 230 people attending. Through the course, students will earn industry certifications required for employment in cyber security. For next year's seniors, an accelerated "Cyber Sprint" class will be offered. A pilot program is happening now at both East and West high schools.

These changes to the high school schedule are a direct response to the feedback we have received from our parents, staff and students. In addition to giving our students more flexibility to try new courses, or even make room in their daily schedule for non-traditional learning experiences like internships, it also gives us a strong foundation for offering more course options down the road and more personalized, real-world learning experiences for our students.

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