



PHOTO BY MADDY EMERSON. Math teacher, Rhonda Willis, listens as a student asks a question during Geometry.

SPLITTING UP THE CURRICULUM

Second lunch divides math, encore, other classes

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As the bell for second lunch rings, freshman Jordan Akins pauses her math class to go to lunch.

"I have Honors Geometry fourth hour, meaning that in the middle of that class, I will break for lunch," Akins said.

With over 900 students in school there is not enough room for all students to eat lunch at the same time. Therefore, lunch is divided into three sections. First lunch is 28 minutes long, second lunch is 25 minutes and last lunch is half an hour. Second lunch dismisses students in the middle of fourth hour. After lunch, students report back to fourth hour to finish the class period. The focus students are putting towards attempting to learn and understand is thrown off for the duration of lunch plus the two passing periods that are five minutes each.

Akins believes this lunch is affecting her ability to learn.

"I dislike when a valuable core class is interrupted," Akins said. "My focus has to be interrupted and resumed after lunch."

While Akins has not quite adjusted to this change, fellow geometry classmate Mikayla Kitchen enjoys having second lunch.

"I have had to have better time management in the class, but I enjoy how open the lunches are. I like it better this way," Kitchen said.

As well as affecting students, the lunch schedule also affects teachers. Specifically, vocal music director Susan Laushman.

Laushman has a total of 73 students in Encore. In previous years, the scheduled lunch times have worked to her benefit. She kept the female portion

of her students in class during first lunch and worked with them. Then, second lunch was reserved for the boys while girls ate lunch. Finally, she utilized third lunch as a group practice while everyone was present. This allowed for more time to work on individualized parts, which Laushman believes helped their singing ability as a whole.

Having all students at once leaves no opportunity for working with different sections, which Laushman notices has taken a toll on their performances.

"For the past 10 years, Encore has been the lunch block. I gained 125 minutes of instruction per week by teaching during the lunch break, which I did not take. It enabled us to get so much more accomplished," Laushman said. "We are making the most of our time, but it has affected our quality of singing because instructional time has been compromised."

A BALANCING ACT:

Students manage the stresses of school, extracurriculars

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With an upcoming graduation, involvement in extracurricular activities and homework on a daily basis, senior Kaylah Wilson feels "more pressure than ever."

"I feel overwhelmed most of the time," Wilson said. "At times, I think I'm not capable of doing it all. It's a tough situation that I haven't learned how to control."

According to counselor Gina Ulbrich, the pressure felt by Wilson is common among students.

"I see many students with stress in their lives," Ulbrich said. "However, student stress typically seems to manifest from difficulties occurring at home and work or time management."

Although this pressure can serve as motivation at times, it often causes more struggles and difficulties.

"Stress leads to more stress," school psychologist Kenda Fischer said. "Things begin to fall apart and students don't know how to put the pieces back together."

"YOUNG ADULTS ARE BALANCING MORE THAN EVER..."

There are different factors contributing to student pressure, but according to Fischer the most common is overextension.

"Young adults are balancing more than ever," Fischer said. "There are more opportunities. When they get too many things on their plate, they realize they can't."

Sophomore Kamryn Kelley balances sports, photojournalism and clubs — all activities requiring extra work outside of school.

"I am more stressed than I ever have been," Kelley said. "I don't come home until late at night and I barely have time to do my homework."

According to Ulbrich, there is a common misconception that colleges emphasize involvement in as many extracurricular activities as possible.

"Students think colleges will look down on them for quitting a few activities, but overextended students are already involved in so many other things," Ulbrich said. "It's okay to back off and fully engage in the activities that you really do love and want to continue on with."

Kylie Piva, admissions director at Labette Community College, sees this misconception when viewing college applications. However, she prefers a student to fully devote their time to a smaller number of school activities.

"I stand by the idea of less is more if you're giving 100 percent to the activities that you are involved in," Piva said. "I would much rather see a student that is passionate about a few things than just listing a lot to make themselves look good."

Fischer advises overextended students to emphasize activities and drop what isn't as

important to them.

"The first thing to do when you are stressed is take a step back," Fischer said. "You have to look at what you feel is important and prioritize your responsibilities."

Despite being overly involved, Wilson would not consider a reduction of activities even though the importance of academics has diminished for her.

"School is starting to become second in my life, instead of first like it always has been, but I want to push myself, so I have to make time for extracurriculars," Wilson said.

Not only does overinvolvement stress a student out psychologically, but it also affects their overall well-being. Wilson has experienced this stress firsthand.

"I don't get enough sleep as it is already, but now the stress just keeps piling up and I get sick easily," Wilson said.

Moreover, adult pressure is another factor contributing to this pressure. According to Fischer, "learning how to say no" is a problem endured by many high school students.

"A teacher often says, 'Hey, you would be really good at this activity,'" Fischer said. "A part of you wants to try it, but you don't realize that doing it is not really right for you and can contribute to more overextending."

However, a student often does not realize they overextended until it happens.

"It's just like the juggler with six balls in the air," Fischer said. "He doesn't know he has a problem until one of them falls."

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-KAMRYN KELLEY

As a result of these increased expectations, Wilson feels especially concerned.

"The anxiety and price of college stresses me out," Wilson said.

However, PSU is not the only college with a rising tuition. According to CNBC, the average cost of tuition at a private, non-profit, four-year university in 2016 was \$31,231— up from \$1,832 in 1971-1972.

Community member Cindy Riachi believes the rising cost of colleges around the nation is unjust and should not cause student pressure.

"The cost of college is one of the highest rising costs in our society and must be contained," Riachi said. "I strongly support socializing it."

"WE AREN'T DEALING WITH FULLY-FORMED ADULTS AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL..."

According to Fischer, another source of pressure is adults' high expectations of students.

"We put a lot of pressure on young adults to figure out what they want to do right now, when they're 18 and they haven't seen or experienced a lot of life," Fischer said. "It's really a difficult place to make that type of decision."

Wilson experiences these responsibilities on a daily basis.

"I feel obligated to make others happy," Wilson said. "Everyone expects me to know what to do, but I can't just put everything down. If I do, then I miss everything going on around me."

In order to combat and relieve student pressure, Fischer said it is imperative to "take it slow."

"We push too much too fast and we expect high schoolers to be grown ups, but they aren't quite there yet," Fischer said. "We aren't dealing with fully-formed adults at the high school level, yet we ask our students to make a lot of adult decisions."

Building relationships is also a key method used to cope with pressure.

"The staff works hard at building relationships with the kids," Ulbrich said. "When we get to know them, we can encourage them to enroll in the classes or programs that will help them be the most successful in meeting their personal educational and career goals."

However, Ulbrich believes limitations and a proper balance between school, home and extracurricular activities is the most beneficial way of handling this common pressure.

"It's okay to not be busy all the time," Ulbrich said. "We've got to learn to take items

A FESTIVAL OF FIRSTS

Thespian troupe earns recognition

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Nearly 50 students traveled to Wichita Jan. 5-7 to attend the Kansas Thespian Festival.

The students the opportunity to attend workshops, compete in contests and watch performances of other schools' productions.

While there, the PHS troupe encountered a number of firsts.

Senior Coral VanBecelaere was the first State Thespian Officer (STO) from PHS and helped organize the conference.

"I got so much leadership experience from [the Festival]," VanBecelaere said. "To be the first [STO] from PHS was definitely one of the highlights of my high school career."

The troupe also took first place in the lobby display contest.

For the tenth year in a row, the group was awarded the status of Gold Honor Troupe, the highest honor a troupe can achieve.

To earn this distinction, junior Cassie Hurt-McLarty, troupe historian, was responsible for creating a portfolio.

"[It took] a lot of time over the semester," Hurt-McLarty said. "I had to collect articles, photographs, ticket stubs and posters from all the different shows we did. After putting so much work into the scrapbook, it felt really nice to get a payoff."

Junior Meghan Hess was the top playwright in the state and had her original work performed by students during the Festival.

"It was an experience that I'd love to live over again and again," Hess said. "The positivity from the audience afterward was encouraging."

Performing a solo, freshman McKenna Shaw became the first PHS student to receive a superior rating. Singing "Lost in the Brass" from "Band Geeks," McKenna qualified to compete at the International Thespian Festival in Lincoln, Neb. June 19-24 and was invited to perform again later for the students.

"It meant a great deal to me to be rewarded for my hard work," McKenna said. "The gala performance was amazing [because it is] not very often that you receive the opportunity to perform in front of 2,000 of your peers."

Theater director Greg Shaw is proud of his troupe's success this year.

"I would consider ourselves to be one of the main programs in the state," Greg said. "There's a handful of schools that are aggressively involved in theater and we're definitely one of them."