



Frequently Asked Questions About the First Fifteen Minutes

Q1: What is the contractual language concerning being in the building fifteen minutes before the opening session?

A: Section 16.1's first sentence reads: All teachers, everyone in the RTA bargaining unit, will be in their buildings fifteen (15) minutes before the opening (instructional) sessions begin.

Q2: Is that contractual language new?

A: No, that language is not new. It was negotiated in 1992.

Q3: So what is different now from previous school years?

A: The District decided, unilaterally, that this year students will be coming off buses and into schools for breakfast during the fifteen minutes prior to the beginning of instruction.

Q4: On what grounds is the District basing the right to make this decision?

A: The District is basing this decision on their interpretation of a 2014 arbitration award on School #7 and the District is now applying that award to all schools in the RCSD and not just School #7. RTA is challenging the District's interpretation.

Q5: Does this mean that I am now required to come to work 15 minutes earlier?

A: No. Teachers' reporting time has not changed.

Q6: Are these fifteen minutes unencumbered?

A: The Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) arbitrator ruled in 2014, in an arbitration involving School #7, that these 15 minutes cannot be encumbered for instruction or teaching. But that arbitrator also ruled that non-instructional duties could be assigned, if needed.

Q7: In the past it was considered preparation time at the elementary schools. Is this not true now?

A: The union's position is that the first fifteen minutes should, indeed, be teachers' preparation time. But until our challenge to the District's unilateral decision to apply the 2014 School #7 arbitration to all schools is resolved, each school should have an agreement between the RTA Building Committee and the school principal on how the students will be accommodated during the 15 minutes before instruction. Such an agreement would be reviewed and, if necessary, adjusted by the Building Committee on an annual basis.

Q8: What are the suggested ways for accommodating students during the first 15 minutes?

A: Both the District and the RTA recommend that the preferred option should be to gather students for breakfast in large areas such as the cafeteria. In schools with small cafeterias, other large common areas should also be utilized.

Q9: What is the advantage to using large common spaces for students' breakfast?

A: It would require fewer staff members to supervise, it would keep classrooms more sanitary, and it would protect teachers' time to prepare for the instructional day.

Q10: Should teachers who have students reporting at the first bell be used to supervise students for breakfast?

A: No. Non-teaching staff (administrators, et al.) should be considered first – and especially before teachers whose teaching responsibilities begin at first bell.

Q11: What if we like how this has been handled in the past at our school?

A: Any agreement must still be adopted at the RTA Building Committee. Teacher representatives on the RTA Building Committee should caucus with their constituents prior to signing off on arrangements.

Q12: Our school's Building Committee hasn't been elected yet. What can we do before the first day of school?

A: The RTA Faculty Rep(s) can make a preliminary tentative plan with the school principal for the time between the opening of school and when the RTA Building Committee is elected. Then the RTA Building Committee must review and determine whether to continue that temporary plan or negotiate changes.

Q13: What if our Building Committee and principal can't reach an agreement?

A: Please contact the RTA Office at that point. We will reach out to the District to jointly assist.

Q14: And what about the last 15 minutes at dismissal? Must everyone remain for 15 minutes at the end of the day?

A: No. The contract language says "up to" fifteen minutes after the conclusion of the school instructional day. This is to be used only to support the safe dismissal of students (which could be less than fifteen minutes). And administrators cannot assign any other duties to teachers that are unrelated to students' dismissal.

As already mentioned, we are challenging the District's decision and will keep you informed about the progress of our efforts. We will monitor how this unilateral change imposed by the District impacts your working conditions and we will update this FAQ document as needed. Meanwhile, if you have additional questions, contact your RTA Faculty Representative(s) or contact us directly.