



RAPHAEL HOUSE

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL

Start and Finish Hours- Raphael House

Background

During the twelve months I have been principal at Raphael House I have heard a reasonable degree of frustration anecdotally from a range of both staff and parents about the difference of 40 minutes in start time between the Upper School and the Lower school.

This also became a raised issue during a bus review in Term 1.

Currently the upper School (Class 8-12) begin school at 8.20am and the Lower school (Classes 1-7) begin school at 9am.

It was agreed with the Board of Trustees at Raphael House to complete a small-scale research, focused first on gaining an understanding of what other area schools, who have with both primary and secondary students do with regards to start, and finish times and how the school day is structured. The second part of the research would focus on gaining some staff and community voice with regards to whether bringing the start times closer together or to the same time has general interest.

The objective was to collate this voice into a few options of possibility going forward and then do another consultation round of staff and students with regards to the particular options that emerge.

Literature

There is significant research from a range of countries indicating that academic performance of adolescents increases with later start times. (Wahlstrom 2014, Wheaton, Chapman & Croft, 2016, Bastia & Fuller, 2018)

However, of increasing importance is the general indication in the literature that later start times also positively affect the wellbeing of adolescents as a later start time aligns better with a natural teenage body clock. Many scientific studies show that circadian rhythm of a teenager differs markedly from that of an adult by approximately two hours. *"In schools that started later there were better grades, more sleep and these schools also experienced fewer episodes of depression when compared to schools that started later."* (Jensen The Teenage Brain p 94)

There is widespread literature promoting the benefit of longer learning periods for both academic progress and more practical subjects. There is a general trend that the fewer transitions a student makes between learning areas in a day the stronger they can engage and progress. Longer learning periods however, need to be

accompanied by a change in teacher pedagogy and a re-visiting of what is important in each learning area. Longer periods do require a restructuring of the number of learning periods for each subject area over the week.

In New Zealand the legal requirement is that school is open for two hours before 12 Noon and two hours after 12 midday. There is a set amount of days per year that differ for primary and secondary/composite schools (Rapahel House is in the latter category), but no set requirements of hours in the day apart from that already stated. Opening hours are the prerogative of each Board of Trustees, but any change to the is required to be consulted with the staff and community.

Method

A small survey was sent to all area schools asking to share their start and finish times and if they were prepared to answer more in depth question about the structure of their day.

A small survey was sent to all staff asking them to participate if they were interested to generally gauge feeling about bring the start times closer together or to the same time.

A similar small survey was sent to the parent community asking if they supported start times coming closer together or the same and asking for a general indication of what start time would work best for them and their families.

Findings

A. Other Schools

Thirty-six area schools replied to the original survey.

Start Times

Of these six do not start at the same time and thirty do.

Of the six schools who start at separate times four had a ten-minute difference between their secondary starting and their primary starting 9 e.g. 8.50 and 9.00, one had a fifteen minute (8.30 and 8.45) and one (Rapahel House) had a 40-minute difference.

Closing Times

Of the thirty-six a different six schools had a separate closing time.

Of these six, four of them were a five-ten-minute difference. One was a 30-minute difference with primary finishing at 3pm and secondary at 3.30pm and one had a 45-minute difference but only three times a week.

General

It was of note none of the area schools had a different opening and closing time for primary and secondary students.

A number of schools made the comment that they did find it difficult to fit things into their secondary curriculum but were driven to keep starting and closing times the same for transportation- both buses and parental pick-ups of families.

B. Rapahel House Staff

Thirty-four staff replied to the staff survey

In answer to the question- Do you support bringing the start times closer together?

- 26 replied yes. These were fairly balanced from Lower School, upper school and staff who work across both areas.
- 1 replied no This was a response from an Upper School staff member.
- 7 replied maybe. Of these four were from Lower School, two from Upper School and one from Administration staff

In answer to the question- Do you support bringing the Upper School start time later?

- 24 replied yes.
- 1 replied no
- 9 replied maybe.

These responses ranged across all areas of the schools

In answer to the question- Do you support bringing the Lower School start time earlier?

- 14 replied yes. 9 replied no
- 11 replied maybe.

These responses ranged across all areas of the schools

In the additional notes there was a large range of suggestions.

The general themes were:

- Staff members who are also parents find the different start times difficult
- Questions around the implications of a later start time possibly meaning a later finish time
- Questions around what is required legally
- Some agreement with later starting for the wellbeing of adolescents, although some also felt the start time was okay
- Concerns around making sure Main Lesson time is prominent for both US and LS
- Concerns around traffic congestion if for example LS and US started at 8.45am which is the same time as kindergarten
- There were some outliers, one of whom who suggested a much earlier start and finish for all based on a personal preference and also an outlier who suggested a much later start and finish time for all based on the buses.

C. Raphael House Parent Community

There were 91 responses which indicates a topic people are invested in. The responses came from a range of parents with students in both Lower and Upper school as well as a range from across all the geographic communities we serve.

4. Would you prefer the starting time to be either closer together or the same for the Upper School and Lower school?

[More Details](#)

Yes	48
No	11
Maybe	28



General comments supporting a move closer together mentioned convenience and Lower School students not waiting around so long if they were family drop offs or bus students.

General comments supporting the separation of start times were related to easing traffic congestion and separating upper school students from Lower school students as they walked up the hill.

6. If we were to bring the starting time together so that both the Lower school and Upper school began at the same time what time would you prefer?

[More Details](#)

8.20am	4
8.30am	15
8.40am	16
8.50am	14
9.00am	33



The most common theme that emerged was that whatever time we do go with shouldn't make the day any longer than it already is and that students should still get break times ie: shortening the school day shouldn't mean cramming more into it.

8. Can you see any benefit in exploring a different closing time (we currently all finish at 3pm)

[More Details](#)

Yes	21
No	39
Maybe	29



There were a large range of comments relating to this. Some support it and some don't. Often the same reasons are given. For instance, some say extending the closing hours will ease traffic congestion while others

say it will add to carbon footprints they would have to make two trips if the closing times were different. Many mention bus implications and afterschool sports and events and say any later will create issues, particularly in terms 2 and 3.

There was some mention of a later start time once a week as many secondary schools do. There are a number of secondary schools who do either a later start time or an earlier finish time once a week. This time is then usually dedicated to staff development. This may cause issues for families of primary students, however.

Discussion

It is important to note that the relevance and importance if the Main Lesson is not under discussion here. Whatever decision is made about a start time we need to construct the daily timetable to hold the Main Lesson time, and indeed increase it for the Lower School. We do need a timetable that aligns across Lower and Upper School after Main Lesson as we have an increasing number of specialist teachers who teach across both. By aligning start times, we will naturally allow a re-alignment and re structure of the timetable as well.

While there appears to be widespread agreement on bringing the start times for the Lower School and Upper School closer together, and generally agreement around making the Upper School start time slightly later there are a wide range of suggestions for these and no one solution will suit everyone

The results of the survey to other area schools found none with the difference in start times Rapahel House had. The other schools that had a different start time were generally only five to ten minutes with one being 15 minutes. The ways that other schools split their days up ranged fairly equally between 3,4 and 5 period days.

Outcome

We will complete another survey with specific times to select from and analyse those results with a decision to go to the Board of Trustees in August.

References

Bastian & Fuller (2014) Sage Publications Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/ero>

Jensen, F.E. The Teenage Brain, a neuroscientists guide to raising adolescents and young Adults Harper Collins 2015

Ministry of Education New Zealand

National Sleep Foundation

Wahlstrom 2014, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement University of Minnesota

Wheaton, Chapman & Croft, 2016, Published in Journal School of Health 2016 May; 86 (5) pp 363-381

Appendix B Parent Comments regarding bringing the start times closer or together

Dependent on a bus and I like to play when I get to school
This doesn't impact me as my children are in the upper school.
It makes no difference to me at this time
No strong view either way at this stage
I'm not concerned with starting times
Science says we should let teenagers sleep in as long as possible
We only do one trip in - and that is for and at the same time. So is always early. But that is okay - as long as we can get her out of bed... I understood that different start and finish was due to transport congestion. We would need to sort that one out first perhaps?
I would prefer closer together but not at the same time. I think the upper school needs to start earlier than lower school to both fit their hours in and ease of traffic/bus congestion.
Doesn't impact me as only one child
I absolutely don't want the students to stay at school longer than 3pm, it's the max students should give their time to school. They need some rest and a break in the afternoons! I'm concerned that if school for Upper school starts later, they'll have to stay longer, or have fewer breaks, which seems unhealthy. Not sure if this is an option at all but wanted to mention it! :-)
It's definitely easier for parking when it's not the same time and easier on the residents (we live nearby) but not that worried either way.
While I have ticked yes for the above question, it doesn't directly affect us, as we only have one child at the school. It does seem logical for other families though.
Prefer teenagers to start later as it is scientifically proven they need more sleep. So actually prefer closer together *and* later for older students. Say 9.15pm so they can sleep later if that is possible but if not the gap is small enough that waiting is not a big deal (for both older waiting to start or younger waiting to be collected at the end of the day).
It would mean sibling would be able to start at the same time
Parking is already horrendous, staggering times even by just a little is better in my opinion
I am not affected by this as my children are in the lower school
I'm happy that the Upper School kids are tucked away by the time my daughter walks up the hill for Lower School. Would also prove another parking headache for parents all dropping off at once.
When I had children in both Lower and Upper school it was difficult managing the different start times. It also makes it very hard to find sustainable transport options
I only have a lower school child, and would love for class to start later, definitely not earlier!
Currently I don't understand the early start for upper school - more concentrated lessons with some focus (and a teacher actually) would be a better way to spend the time they are at school I think.
Can the Kindergarten hours please align too?
Don't care either way as only have child on upper school
This would make things easier when juggling lower school siblings in addition to upper school siblings.
I'm happy with the current start time difference
I need more data. Have the times been the same before? If so what was the result compared to now? What are the pros and cons subjectively and which one weighs the other?
It's not an issue currently as both of our children are in the lower school however when one is in the upper school I imagine there will be some transport challenges.
It's mad making two trips or leaving a young child at school over thirty minutes before school starts!
The current time difference is not significant
My understanding was that the LS timetable had changed to 9-3 this year, instead of 8.55 am as previous years and also mentioned in the most recent Bush Telegraph. My preference would be for starting at the same time, see answer to qn 7.
It's fine for us. No need to change the time.
we have 2 children, one in lower the other in upper school. While this won't stay like that forever, the younger one has to spend quite a bit of time at school before lessons start. There is also an element of rising earlier than necessary, which 'we' find hard.

It's not an issue for us right now but once my eldest child enters the Upper School it would be much much easier if the starting times were closer together. We live in rural Upper Hutt and the only option available to get my kids to school is to drive them myself. To get an Upper school child to school on time would have my lower school kids arriving far too early. Alternatively a supervised room for early arriving lower school children could be helpful to mediate this also
We both work and live 30 minutes from the school, we have two younger ones in the lower school so being at school by 8.20 would be a real stretch for our whānau
I think that looking at a later start and finish time for the upper school could be helpful
Yes, if the Upper and Lower school still finish at the same time
only have one child at school so makes no difference to us other than traffic and parking
Have two kids at the school, one starting in the Upper School next year, and would be good for them to walk to school together
Teenagers struggle in the early morning, so it makes little sense to have them at school so early. It also makes the school bus run from Upper Hutt needlessly early, and a struggle for parents and children alike.
Staggered start helps with parking for drop offs and means less congestion on the zig zag for smaller children
This way siblings could go together at the same time.
I like the upper school starting earlier.
It would be preferable if the cars are crowded.
The same or within 10/15 min
As a parent with two children in the Lower School and two children in the Upper School it would be very much more preferable to have the same or similar starting time for the whole school.
I think teenagers need a later start time (brainwave trust findings)
Drop off with multiple children is complicated enough in the mornings especially when travelling 30mins to get there
Same hours will be perfect
It would mean that my youngest daughter wasn't hanging around for half an hour because she has to travel with her elder sibling

Appendix C: Comments on Preference for Start times

Less chance to be late from traffic
I don't mind a later start for teenagers
Any time works for me
Broadens opportunities for carpooling/ride sharing
Particularly for adolescents and their need for sleep, research seems to show a later start time works much better.
My lovely hubby might disagree - but I would rather the upper school be at school a bit later and go later in the day. Public transport in the morning and sport after school is probably the harder part for traveling parents - and not much that we can do about that. Netball practice starts at 4.30 at Walter Nash on Fridays which is hard for us. Better to have practices in lower school after school where kids do not need travel - or have them at lunchtimes or straight after school. But I can see why - as there is building going on...
I would prefer lower school to start 8.50/9am and upper school around 8.45am
Don't mind but 6 hours school is enough as generally tired after a full day - like the option to be able to drop them off earlier though
Again, only if this doesn't mean students have to stay at school longer (later than the current 3pm), or have fewer breaks. mainly concerning Upper School, as they're starting at 8.20 at present.
not really that worried about what time tbh
Anytime slightly later than now ... even 10 extra minutes would be good
I think a later starting time (either 8.40 or 8.50) would be beneficial for students in the US. Their circadian rhythms make it challenging to get up so early!
I actually think more time in the morning relieves the pressure/rush to be ready.
Good start time for getting to work and still adequate time for upper school. Would give lower school teachers more time to do a proper morning circle and main lesson
I would highly endorse and support a later start time. One option would be a hybrid solution; later start time during the colder seasons term 2 and term 3. Another solution could be similar to St Orans who have a later start time of 9.20am every Friday during Term 2 and Term 3.
Whilst I understand the difficulty in timetabling the spread of upper school subjects - I also have also experienced alot of feedback from my children that there is significant amount of wasted time in class. This has been the case since class 9 for all of them.
If it is raining and I need to drop her off it needs to be early so I can get to work
Prefer a later start from 8.50am as feel tamariki benefit from this.
Having the start time at 9am would give greater flexibility and allow for variables such as bus delays etc.
For larger family's with different ages traveling distances for K through upper school its difficult for not much gain.
I think that everyone would benefit from a start time that is closer between the two school stages, especially now with no upper school bus.
The later the start the better for travel to school but also the better for upper school students physiologically
Some sort of compromise in start time so that LS and US start at the same time. But ideally at the later end (8.40-9). Apparently the teenage brain does not cope well with an earlier wake time and some high schools around the country have been trialling later start times. I don't have the research at hand to back this up but have heard this mentioned by numerous psychologists, neurologists, researchers, etc. over the last decade or so. Perhaps the students could be required to make up the time lost (40mins) at home in their own time (apologies, without having a kid in the US I'm unaware of how much at home work they are currently required to do, but there is always benefit in having the opportunity to practice time management skills prior to school departure).
I don't know much detail about the US timetable and curriculum requirements (obviously a shift for teaching staff to tweak the course work, but many institutions have been required to do this around the world in response to COVID, meaning there is precedence for change and an abundance of resources and technology in a way that there wasn't prior to 2020). Shorter "work" stints are more productive than working for longer hours and perhaps something we could instil in our students/children (i.e. shorter day, not necessarily less productive).
The other benefit would be for families, carpooling scenarios and buses if the start time was the same.

My children are still in the LS but I presume once one of them starts in the US having different start times will create issues in terms of what the younger child should do (arrive much earlier than normal/ no supervision when they arrive?/sit in the car or wait on foot outside the school to enter at the time they're allowed). I'm aware of families with kids in both LS/US and it seems like the younger kid usually arrives at school with their older sibling, which presumably is before or around 8am.

by then the worst of the Wellington rush hour is over

I wouldn't want to lengthen the lower school kids day out too much, I think it could work even if the Upper School started 10-15 mins earlier, the main point would be Upper School starting at a time when lower school students were permitted to arrive on school grounds as well

Other high schools in Lower Hutt start at 9am

I don't mind, as long as they have the same hours

An earlier start would make good sense only if school finished earlier, which is worth considering

I think the advantages of a later start particularly for older children is a well established fact as their sleep patterns differ from that of younger children.

I would prefer 8.30 am to avoid the traffic.

Appendix D: Comments on Exploring a Different Finish Time

Same time as kindy
Finishing later would interfere in after school activities
Finish time relates to after school activities do I am happy with a standard 3pm finish and time to get home before it gets too cold and dark plus traffic mounts on the Rd at later time.
Not concerned about timing
Definitely - or if not, some after school care when was littler. She is fine to hang around now. Would love a school van to use for taking kids to sport practices - now that would be awesome.
When you have children in the same family going on buses it will be difficult to have younger children waiting around until their older siblings finish school later. The preference would be to stay at the same finishing time and different start times. It is easier to have younger siblings arrive to school earlier as their are teachers around in the class rooms.
If so, only earlier! We don't want our children to stay at school any longer than 3pm. There's not enough time for resting/own interests etc. already as is! If it was later, it would be a significant change that we'd seriously not be happy about. If a change, then closing earlier only!
I'm happy with a slightly later finish.
I suspect if older children started later or even if they started at the same time, they should be better able to handle a longer school day. Even if they started 10mins later and finished 10mins later it would be better for those with only older children and potentially less impact than now for people with younger children.
If we finished later it would be harder to get to after school activities on time
If you are going to change the starting time to earlier then it would make sense to me to have the finishing time also earlier But if everyone is finishing at the same time the kids all coming down the zig zag at the same time would be quite full on for the smaller class one-class three children
But some form of after school care might be good
A little later could be fine, earlier would add stress for working parents.
If you live outside of the Hutt the travel time is already difficult - at the moment children who live outside of the Hutt, even in Upper Hutt are unable to take part in most afterschool sports and so forth. I wouldn't be adverse to starting the whole school at 8.30am and finishing at 2.30pm.
Even a ten min difference would help so parking might be a bit less pressured.
Different finishing times would help ease traffic congestion. I'd like to see the Kapiti bus leave at 3:00pm to help avoid the big traffic build up from Plimmerton northwards.
It would depend on how many desired this. I for one would love an earlier finish time for the lower school or more so for lower school children who had to take the bus but that would then impact upper school students taking the bus.
I think teens, studies show, kick in later in the day.
Finishing together means less travel and less carbon
Provided it is not after 3pm
A similar time difference to the one at the start of the day is not significant
If going to change the start and finish times, would it work to make this gradual so it's not too much of a shock to the children's circadian rhythm? This would apply mainly if LS stds are starting much earlier or any stds finishing later than normal. Many stds have after school activities or responsibilities so a later finish time might prove trickier than changing the start time.
No need to change this time
open for this, possibly at a later time? But I'm mindful about the teachers workload and time spend at school. There could be an element of self-learning and communal homework or play.
Personally happy with this closing time
A time that does not coincide with all other school finishing times would be useful to avoid traffic mayhem in the Hutt.
I would actually like to see the Upper school start later and finish later as this has been shown to be more beneficial for teens sleep patterns
Better to have a shorter lunch break b it start later for Upper school and finish same time

Other high schools that start at 9am finish at 3.20pm
Not earlier!
Obviously the majority of parents now have to work, and so need to negotiate drop off hours with employers. A later finish and start time would make this significantly easier to achieve.
There are so many cars parked on both sides of the road that it is impossible to pass each other. It would be a little crowded if the closing time is different.
An earlier finish might be good, but NO WAY a later one, there's already too little non-school time during the week!
If the upper school is going to start later, they will have to finish later
Upper school could start 10 mins before lower school and end 10 mins later. Good for bus timing and pick ups
Traffic may be not so bad
The younger children can have an afternoon snack or play while waiting for the older children to finish
That will be more easier to pick up both older n younger children together