

The School Board conducts an annual review of Policy INDCA-Release Time and has done so since the policy was adopted in 2005. As part of its review process in 2016, the School Board discussed a number of education-related considerations, and decided, in a 5-1 vote on July 8, to discontinue the Release Time Policy. The only organization to utilize release time was Weekday Religious Education (WRE); however, release time was not confined to WRE. The policy permitted any religious group to remove students from the classroom, with parental permission, during the school week for 30 minutes of off-campus religious instruction. Below are more facts about the considerations of the School Board in its decision to end release time.

Q: What factors played a role in the decision to discontinue release time?

- A. The School Board carefully deliberated over several important topics, including:
- The educational philosophy and goals of the School Board
 - The manner in which Staunton schools can best serve all students within the limited time available during the instructional day
 - The values of the Staunton community
 - The increased accountability and demands on schools due to federal and state regulations
 - Staunton City Schools' association and work with other local agencies who seek access to students during the school day and after school

Q: Did the School Board consider the significant role of faith in the Staunton community?

- A. The School Board respects and recognizes the important role of the faith community in supporting Staunton families and students, and all Board members recognize faith as an integral part of their own lives. Board members have confidence that the faith community, totaling more than 50 congregations or houses of worship in the City of Staunton, will find creative ways beyond release time during the instructional day for outreach on the matter of religion and faith, and also welcome engagement on the

subject of after-school, off-campus religious program opportunities for students.

Q: What were the participation rates for release time for the last several years?

A. Release time affected elementary school students in grades K through 3. Last school year, 47% of students in those grades participated in release time. However, participation rates have declined significantly over the years. During the 2009-10 school year, participation was at 65% and dropped to 52% in the 2011-12 school year. Since then, it's hovered within a few percentage points of the most recent school year's participation rate of 47%.

Q: How does release time impact the accomplishment of the School Board's goals?

A. One of the School Board's goals is to best serve the entire population of Staunton City Schools by ensuring that a rigorous course of study is provided for all students, while meeting an increasing number of federal and state mandates. Because of intense SOL testing requirements, Staunton schools are tasked with preparing students well in advance for these benchmark tests. The foundation is laid in the first few years of schooling, and can best be accomplished with ample classroom instruction time and with as few significant, recurring disruptions or distractions as possible.

Q: How much instruction time was lost as a result?

A. Students whose parents elected to opt-in to release time left the classroom for 30 minutes, once per week, for religious education. However, there was also transition time involved as students prepared to leave the classroom and transition back to the classroom, which equated to approximately 40 minutes, once per week. This also did not include the investment of staff time to transition students from one location to the next and the time it took to reorganize student groups for instruction. See the chart below for approximate instruction time lost annually.

	Release Time Sessions	Instructional Time Lost
Kindergarten*	15 sessions x 40 minutes	600 minutes or 10 hours per year
Grades 1 and 2	30 sessions x 40 minutes	1,200 minutes or 20 hours per year
Grade 3*	15 sessions x 40 minutes	600 minutes or 10 hours per year

**These grades have just one semester, resulting in fewer sessions.*

Q: What happened to the students who did not participate in release time?

A. When release time occurred, regular instruction stopped for *all* students. Teachers could not proceed with regular instruction until all students had returned to the classroom, as established in the school division's former INDCA-AR policy. Instead, students who remained in the classroom received other lessons created by their teachers. As a result, all students, participatory or not, were missing between 2.2 to almost 5 days of content instruction during release time.

Q: Is the school division open to assisting with after-school religious education opportunities for students?

A. The school division maintains partnerships with a range of community agencies and organizations that sponsor opportunities for children after school, and assists in providing transportation for students to participate in those opportunities off campus. Much like the school division works with other agencies that sponsor opportunities for children after school, arrangements could be made to work with WRE to transport children to an offsite location per parental permission.

Questions?

Please contact Staunton City Schools at 540.332.3920.