**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SEMESTERS** – Issue 1, October 7, 2014

1. How does the timetable work?

A typical semester schedule divides the year into two halves; Sept to the end of January, and February to the end of June. Students take half of their 8, 7, or 6 credits each semester. Grade 12 students in their 5th year may choose one semester only and finish in January, or stay for their full year with 4, 5, or even 6 credits as long as they are in compliance with the 34 credit cap required by the Ministry of Education. Both semesters have a 5 day exam schedule at the end. There are other options to this schedule, and those will be investigated, and a final decision on the schedule we will use will be made and posted on our website in the next month.

The periods are usually 75 minutes in length and often a Day 1, Day 2 schedule will ‘flip’ the last two periods so that student athletes are not always missing the same subject. In addition, the lunch period, if a common lunch for the whole school is shortened to 50-60 minutes.

1. When are report cards issued in a semester system? What about full disclosure?

There are two provincial report cards per semester. The first report is in mid-November, with a final report for the first semester classes in early February. The first report for second semester is in mid-April, with a final report for second semester classes issued at the end of June.

Full disclosure applies to non-semester and semester setting. For both semesters, full-disclosure is 5 days after the first report card. After this full disclosure date, under the terms of the “full disclosure” policy, all Grade 11 and 12 courses taken or attempted by students, including students who are identified as exceptional pupils, will be recorded on the Ontario Student Transcript, and with the percentage grades earned and the credits gained.

1. How will a 75 minute period affect student learning?

There is significant evidence that sustained learning or sustained attention span seems to have a maximum of 40-45 minutes. Thus, teachers must plan for activities and learning that allows the attention span to shift and reset in either a 60 minute or 75 minute class. A student may regain their focus on their learning by taking a kinesthetic break, doing a different kind of activity, or changing mental focus. Interest and engagement is gained by lesson planning that ensures transitions in the type of learning occur over the period length. For example a lesson that plans well for attention span might be; Minds On question, think/pair/share answer, mini-lesson with note, guided practice questions, mini-lesson with handout, work with a partner on an assignment or questions. Depending on the subject matter, teachers will usually ensure a kinesthetic (stand, move around, perform a physical task) aspect to the lesson as well, as we know that enables students to re-focus.

1. What are my options for a 4 or 5 year graduation plan?

One of the key factors in our decision to move to a semester system was flexibility for student regarding their graduation plan. The Ministry of Education has established a 34 credit cap that must students and families must plan for in addition to the question of; will I remain for a 5th year? As Principal, I would continue to advocate that students consider a full or partial 5th year in order to allow time to focus on their University or College credits, gain academic maturity, and experience the many program options available in the Grade 12 program.

In a semester setting, or a non-semester setting, most students will chose to complete their 30 credit requirements for graduation in their 4th year. The additional courses they would then chose to take could be completed in one, or two semesters. Some students will want a ‘Semester 1 Only’ schedule so that they can upgrade or take additional courses and then work, travel or prepare for post-secondary programs the second half of the year. Other students may want to take 3, 4 or 5 credits over the full year, with courses scheduled for both semesters in order to spread out their studies, or stay involved in sports or activities over the full year. Individual students will work with their Guidance counsellor if staying for a 5th year to determine; which year they want to attend Commencement, ensure their 34 credit count is taken care of, and determine a full year or Semester 1 only schedule.

1. With the subjects repeated every day, will there be too much Homework?

My expectations as the Principal is that reasonable timelines still have to be established by the classroom teacher and that homework assignments need to have a basis of quality work to improve student learning. Having less subjects at once, and the longer length periods in a semester timetable, allows for some homework practice in class. Your son or daughter should experience similar homework expectations in terms of time each evening to our current practices.

1. Is it possible to have a two semester ‘gap’ on a core subject such as Math, English or Science?

An example of this scenario might be; Math semester 1 in Grade 9, and then a gap where Math is scheduled in semester 2 in the student’s Grade 10 year. Thus, the student could have a Feb to Feb ‘gap’ without Math. Yes, this can occur, but the curriculum spirals (repeats key learnings over each year) for this reason and due to the challenges of retaining key information in a student’s long term memory each year. Thus, teachers plan for and allow for re-learning to occur in semester schedules. It may also be noteworthy that in terms of memory studies, students forget the material over the summer break in a similar manner to forgetting the material in a two semester break. The key is for any important learning to be transferred into long term memory, where it can be retrieved or referenced with ease regardless of how long ago the learning occurred. In terms of the potential for a gap in learning from a semester schedule some exceptional students, with an IEP or IPRC, will be hand timetable to ensure this does not occur, or that their GLE or Resource support period is in the same semester as their greatest academic challenges.

Please visit the website again in a few weeks for more FAQ’s, or email your specific question to me at jennifer\_shortreed@wrdsb.on.ca or my Vice Principal at james\_shantz@wrdsb.on.ca

Sincerely, Jennifer Shortreed (Principal, WCI)