

Community-based babysitting service connects Lamorinda parents with trusted caregivers

By Diane Claytor



Lamorinda Night Out founders Heather Aguiar (left) and Nicole Damhesel
Photo Diane Claytor

Date night. Reservations at a romantic restaurant have been made. But wait ... who's taking care of the kids? You have a long-planned girls' night out but, just your luck, your husband had to go out of town, or you were told about a last minute business dinner you have to attend and your usual babysitter is on vacation. What are you going to do with the kids?

Nicole Damhesel and Heather Aguiar, two Lafayette residents (as well as local preschool teachers and former nannies), have the answer for you: Lamorinda Night Out.

Damhesel, the assistant director at Lafayette's Building Bridges Preschool, and Aguiar, a Building Bridges teacher, formed LMNO last year. "Working in a preschool,"

Aguiar explained, "we often get approached by families looking for babysitters."

She and Damhesel began talking about using their contacts and experience to "create a network of families and babysitters that we know and trust," Aguiar continued, resulting in the creation of LMNO, an organization connecting "trusted and qualified child care professionals" with families needing their services.

Both Damhesel and Aguiar are well aware of the many other sites helping families find sitters. In fact, they've even used them. But, they noted, those sites typically send you sitters you don't know. "You just have to take what you get," Damhesel said. "We thought it would be nice if there was a local service employing people from the community and convenient for both families and sitters."

"So many of the people asking us about sitters are like family to us," she continued. "We want them to have sitters they can trust, someone who is safe, reliable and responsible."

LMNO is a membership-based service. Families pay a fee - \$30 for one month, \$300 for an annual membership - and are guaranteed a sitter anytime and every time they need one. "Once a family becomes a member," Aguiar said, "they can hire one of our sitters once a month, once a week or every other day." If one of the regular LMNO sitters is unavailable, either Damhesel or Aguiar will take on the task.

Sitters are paid directly by the families and their rates, generally \$15-20 per hour, are set by LMNO, based on experience and qualifications. The entire amount goes to the sitter. "Everyone knows the rate in advance so there's none of those awkward 'how much do I owe you' conversations," Aguiar noted.

Families complete an extensive membership form, providing information on their children's personalities, activities and interests. "That way," Damhesel said, "we can send the most appropriate sitter for the family." She remembered one family that had a very lively, active child. "One of our sitters has three brothers so she was the perfect choice for this 'high energy' kid."

LMNO has very precise, and clearly spelled out, policies for both families and sitters. Families know there is a three-hour minimum for sitters; there may be a fee for last minute requests or cancellations; and an additional fee may be charged if multiple families are using the sitter.

Sitters are expected to spend time with the kids, or as Aguiar said, not spend time on their phones or watching TV. "We hold our sitters to a very high standard," she stated, and the policies basically spell out how they should act on the job. "We'll send sitters out with games," Damhesel added. "Or movies if parents are OK with letting their kids watch one. We want the sitters to be interacting with the kids, not sitting on the couch." Sitters

must be CPR-certified before they can care for kids under the age of 10.

Potential sitters are "tested" by taking care of Damhesel's 8-year-old daughter. "She's the final approval," Damhesel said. "If I can trust my child with the person, then I'm comfortable sending him or her out to care for other families' children. My daughter also gives great feedback, letting me know if the sitter actually played with her or just watched."

"We want sitters who are serious about the job so they can give attention and love to the families they're caring for," Damhesel said. LMNO wants their families to have the security of knowing their sitter is committed and "that their children will be well cared for," she noted.

Everything is done online; membership applications and sitter request forms are on lamorinda-nightout.com; potential childcare providers can find application information on the website, too.

The one-year-old company remains small. "We're servicing a community, not trying to be a massive business," Aguiar explained. Damhesel continued, noting that they want LMNO to be "home grown. We've put a lot of heart and passion into this organization. We don't want to be a large babysitting chain but a small, community-based service."

New AUHSD schedule hopes to broaden scope of student learning

By John T. Miller

Students at the Acalanes Union High School District will be greeted by a new bell schedule and a modified block schedule when they return to school on Monday, Aug 21.

The schedule is a result of work by a stakeholder task force that researched various schedules from other districts and made recommendations to the governing board.

The AUHSD governing board supported the change after many meetings over an eight-month period. According to the district's website, teachers will have the opportunity for "professional development to support the instructional/curricular shift with the schedule and the longer instructional blocks, as well as to design the Academy period systems to op-

imize the potential of this change."

With a few small revisions, the schedule is basically the same as what the schools experimented with last spring for a two-week period.

AUHSD Associate Superintendent Amy McNamara said, "One of the driving forces behind block schedule is to go deeper in the curriculum with more analysis and critical thinking, while at the same time slowing down the schedule and addressing student stress."

She added that, with the common core shift to more in-depth discussion, the block schedule allows the students and teachers to cover "more depth and less breadth."

The new Academy periods give teachers and students opportunities to talk and work together and allows flex time in the week for intervention and enrichment.

"We are very aware of teachers needing time to redesign," said McNamara, pointing out that there will be three days of in-service before school starts and opportunities for teachers to adjust to a "time of transition and change."

The new schedule features a full seven-period day of 50-minutes each beginning at 8:35 a.m. on Mondays. Tuesdays and Thursdays will begin at 8 a.m., with students attending first, second, third, and seventh periods of one-and-a-half

hours each. On Wednesdays and Fridays the day begins for students at 8:35 a.m. with fourth, fifth, and sixth periods - on these days the teachers will have time for staff meetings and collaboration from 7:30-8:30 a.m., and there will also be an Academy period of 55 minutes between fourth and fifth period.

While the schedule may be confusing at first, more and more schools across the nation are going to some sort of modified block schedule to better meet the needs of today's students.

The district recommends that questions regarding the block schedule be directed toward the student's principal's office.



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2017-2018 School Day Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1st Period 8:35-9:20	1st Period 8:00-9:30	Staff/Collaboration 7:30-8:30	1st Period 8:00-9:30	Staff/Collaboration 7:30-8:30
9:20-9:25-Passing	9:30-9:40-Passing	8:30-8:35-Passing	9:30-9:40-Passing	8:30-8:35-Passing
2nd Period 9:25-10:10	2nd Period 9:40-11:10	4th Period 8:35-10:05	2nd Period 9:40-11:10	4th Period 8:35-10:05
10:10-10:15-Passing	11:10-11:15-Brunch	10:05-10:15-Passing Academy 10:15-11:10	11:10-11:15-Brunch	10:05-10:15-Passing Academy 10:15-11:10
3rd Period 10:15-11:00	11:15-11:25-Passing	11:10-11:15-Brunch	11:15-11:25-Passing	11:10-11:15-Brunch
11:00-11:10-Brunch	3rd Period 11:25-12:55	11:15-11:25-Passing	3rd Period 11:25-12:55	11:15-11:25-Passing
11:10-11:15-Passing	12:00-12:05-Passing	5th Period 11:25-12:55	5th Period 11:25-12:55	5th Period 11:25-12:55
4th Period 11:15-12:00	12:50-1:25-Lunch	12:55-1:25-Lunch	12:55-1:25-Lunch	12:55-1:25-Lunch
12:00-12:05-Passing	1:25-1:30-Passing	1:25-1:35-Passing	1:25-1:35-Passing	1:25-1:35-Passing
5th Period 12:05-12:50	6th Period 1:30-2:15	6th Period 1:35-3:05	6th Period 1:35-3:05	6th Period 1:35-3:05
12:50-1:25-Lunch	2:15-2:20-Passing	7th Period 2:20-3:05	7th Period 2:20-3:05	7th Period 2:20-3:05
1:25-1:30-Passing	7th Period 2:20-3:05			