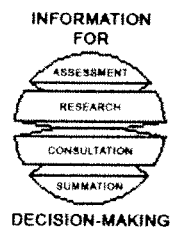


Lengthened School Day Survey 2010 Report

August 2010

DEPARTMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY



ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

During the 2009-2010 school year, Alexandria City experienced record snowfall. This inclement weather caused the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to cancel ten full days of classes, and delay the opening of school on two days. To make-up this lost instructional time, the ACPS School Board approved the addition of 30 minutes to the K-12 school day. Beginning on March 8, 2010 and through June 4, 2010, an extra 10 minutes were included in the morning and 20 minutes were built-into the afternoon.

At the close of the academic year, 491 ACPS employees completed an electronic survey regarding the make-up time (332, provided narrative comments). The survey included 16 items designed to garner staff perceptions of the additional instructional time as it related to the overall effort to make-up the lost instructional time, student achievement, personal hardships, communication with staff and parents, value of the strategy, and effective use.

Highlights

- Fifty-percent (50%, n = 244) of the staff personally rated the overall effort to make-up the lost instructional time as an 'A' or 'B'. However, only 34% thought that their colleagues would give the effort an 'A' or 'B'.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of elementary staff gave the strategy an 'A' or a 'B', while only 18% of middle school staff, and 43% of high school staff gave the strategy an 'A' or a 'B'.
- Approximately one-half (49%, n = 242) of all staff disagreed with the statement that the lengthened school day was a good strategy to increase student achievement. Yet, a majority of them reported that they (61%, n = 298), and their colleagues (47%, n = 226) made creative use of the extra time to help students achieve.
- The most frequently reported examples of activities during the additional time were: 1) SOL review, 2) individual intervention 3) literacy/math content focus, 4) make-up assignments, and 5) completing typical school day activities.
- Staff cited, student burnout as an uncontrollable outcome related to the additional time (e.g., "*The students were "done" by ninth period. Chaos reigned. It was a stressful time as well as the most dreaded period of the day*").
- Many benefits for student improvement were noted (e.g., "*Students who would not otherwise receive additional services, benefited from extra help from reading/ELL teachers. I did see improvements in academic achievement in these students*").

Implications and Recommendations

Additional instructional time improves student achievement⁴. When school time is not effective, there are fewer student benefits. The survey provides insight into staffs' perceptions of the benefits on student achievement; however, it is unclear if this time led to student academic gains. What is clear from the survey, and trends in research related to instructional time, is that additional effective instructional time yields positive increases in student academic and social gains.

Background

During the 2009-2010 school year, Alexandria City experienced record snowfall. This inclement weather caused the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to cancel ten full days of classes, and delay the opening of school on two days. The cancelations resulted in ACPS elementary students missing 61.50 hours of instructional time and secondary students to have missed 65.66 hours of instructional time. Title 22.1 of Virginia Code requires all school divisions to provide 180 days or 990 hours of instructions to students in grades 1-12, and 540 hours of instruction to kindergarten students¹. The ACPS school calendar allotted 183 school days, 1,036.25 hours of instructional time for elementary schools and 1,112.50 hours of instructional time for secondary schools. Given state and local requirements, the ACPS School Board was presented three options for making up the lost instructional time:

- 1) Restore only the amount of time needed to meet state requirements.
- 2) Use a combination of spring break days at the end of the year to make up missed days
- 3) Restore instructional time by adding minutes to the remaining instructional days.

The three options were discussed among the ACPS community as they related to meaningful instructional time, support of student learning, high rates of student and teacher attendance. In light of these criteria, option 3 was proposed and subsequently approved by the ACPS School Board as the best choice to restore the lost of instructional time. This option was recommended and accepted because, the ACPS as a community of both parents and educators, believed that the additional time in the classroom was valuable to students. The goal of the proposed plan to make up additional time was to restore as many lost hours as possible while ensuring that the additional minutes maximize quality instruction².

Beginning on March 8, 2010 and ending June 4, 2010, an additional 10 minutes were included in the morning and 20 minutes in the afternoon of the school day³. Various adjustments were made for school levels and the modified calendar schools that resulted in a 175-day school year (176 days at MSC schools), with 1,024.25 elementary instructional hours (1,022 hours at MSC schools), and 1,097.17 middle school hours, and 1091.92 high school hours.

Expectations for use of this time were discussed with ACPS principals during a principals' meeting. Direction was given to principals that the additional time was to be spent on core instruction. It could have been an extension of the current time used to offer targeted interventions or enrichment activities to students. It could have been an extension of reading, writing, math, social studies or science (or some combination of those). Schools were also allowed to develop their own schedules for that time that would be instructionally purposeful.

Survey Description

Between June 15 and June 18, 2010, all ACPS staff were invited via email to participate in the electronic lengthened school day survey. The survey was designed to garner staff perceptions of the additional instructional time as it relates to the overall effort to make-up the lost time, student achievement, personal hardships, communication with staff and parents, value of the strategy, and creative use of the time. The survey, developed by ACPS Department of Accountability, included 16 items, 13 closed choice items and three free response items (see Appendix A). The estimated time to complete it was 5-10 minutes.

Survey Results

Participants. Four-hundred-ninety-one ACPS employees completed the survey. Three-hundred-thirty two staff also provided narrative for the free response items. Elementary schools were the primary work location for 261 respondents (53%), 216 were from secondary schools (44%). Other respondents included staff whose primary location was not a single school. Of the staff to respond, 67% identified themselves as classroom teachers. **Tables 1- 2**

Overall grade. Fifty-percent (50%, n = 244) of the staff personally rated the overall effort to make-up the lost instructional time as an 'A' or 'B'. However, only 34% thought that their colleagues would give the effort an 'A' or 'B'. Elementary school staffs' overall grading of the strategy was more favorable compared to middle and high schools'. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of elementary staff gave the strategy an 'A' or a 'B', while only 18% of middle school staff, and 43% of high school staff gave the strategy an 'A' or a 'B'. Only 14% of elementary staff gave the strategy a 'D' or 'F' and half 50% of middle school, and 30% of the high school staff gave it a 'D' or 'F'. In general, roughly a quarter of all staff gave the strategy a 'C'. Teacher level results were similar to the results by school level. **Tables 3-4, and Figures 1-2**

Student achievement. When asked to rate the effectiveness of the lengthened school day on student achievement, the responses for effective (34%, n =169), mirrored the responses for ineffective (34%, n=169). However, more staff selected very ineffective (16%, n=79) compared to very effective (8%, n=39). Similarly, staff were divided in 'Yes' or 'No' responses about the extended day being a good strategy to increase student achievement. Middle school teachers was more likely than elementary or high school staff to respond 'No' to the lengthened school day being a good strategy to increase student achievement. **Tables 5-6 and Figure 3**

Creative use of time. The majority of staff reported that they (61%, n = 298), and their colleagues (47%, n = 226) made creative use of the extra time to help students achieve. About half (45%) responded as not knowing if their colleagues made creative use of the extra time to help students achieve. The most frequently reported examples of activities during the additional time were:

1) SOL review

“Used student response systems (clickers) to review for SOL based on released tests”

2) Individual intervention

“I was able to use this time to add on 15 minutes to both of my math classes. This was wonderful because it left time open to a lot of enrichment and intervention. My students also loved having the extra time because they truly enjoy math and were excited to be in the room for an extended period.”

3) Literacy/Math content focus

“Our students do not spend enough time each day engaging in sustained silent reading (especially at home) and I was able to add a solid 20 minutes of accountable, self-selected reading time in the afternoon.”

4) Make-up assignments

“We used it as a "catch up" time to allow students who were behind to get back on track with their studies.”

5) Completing typical school day activities

“I actually had enough time to teach all the regular things I should be doing everyday instead of rushing through. It was not enough time together (since we broke it into 10 before school and 20 after) to do any one "thing" more. Far too many distractions that interfered with planned activities. I tried to add one complete lesson on any day we doubled up. Still could not get through the curriculum.” **Tables 7-8 and Narrative Responses**

Embracing the strategy. It is unclear if the schools fully embraced the strategy, as the responses were evenly distributed across response options. Elementary teachers were more likely (39%) to report that staff at their school embraced the strategy of lengthening the school day, compared to middle school teachers (14%), and high school teachers (19%). **Table 9 and Figure 4**

Hardships. Staff responses to the question of personal hardship were seemingly split, with 56% saying yes, and 44% selecting ‘No’. Middle school teachers were more likely (60%) than elementary (45%) and high school teachers (47%) to say ‘Yes’ when asked if the longer day caused them any personal hardship. Respondents referred to the additional time as a burden on their family lives:

For the staff with children at home, the early start time was an extreme hardship. Getting children up, dressed, fed and off to school all by or before 7 am something made for a very long and energy sapping day for all. Add afterschool activities and homework on top of that and there is very little time or energy left for family.

Yes: I had less time to spend with my family, time for the gym to destress/read a book, less time to spend at my kitchen table grading papers, less time to sleep... The lengthened day was a serious hardship for my family. The later release time lengthened my commute home by at least a half hour every evening. This is totally unfair to teachers who cannot afford to live in this city and thank God I don't have a child to pick up from daycare because I could not have afforded the extra cost.[...] There are multiple instances throughout the year where teachers are expected to be present for after-hours events and [activities] and these always affect commute time and take away from our personal lives and responsibilities.

Student and staff burnout was cited often as a hardship experienced from the longer school day.

My biggest problem was that I was extremely tired at the end of the day, and especially at the end of the week. At first I couldn't figure out why I was so tired on Fridays. When I realized that I had worked an extra 2 and one-half hours that week, then I understood. All of that extra time was interacting with students.

While I was originally supportive of the idea of a lengthened day, the reality was that students and teachers were too exhausted to make valuable use of the extra time. In some ways, the lengthened day only contributed to a feeling of burn-out and may, in fact, have done more harm than good.

I felt like the added minutes to the schedule also was too much for some of my students. They started to get tired and less motivated from the longer time at school. To be honest, as a teacher, I also felt the added minutes physically.

Elementary school teachers referred to physiological distress, such as fatigue and hunger.

Students came to school much more tired than normal and seemed to suffer increased "school fatigue"

The longer school days was hard on the younger children! By 2:30, they are tired!"

The longer day was very hard on the younger students. Starting so early and staying longer with the current strict, inflexible schedules that were created for the classes was difficult. The kids were worn out by around 2:00 and focus and content retention during valuable instruction time became an issue.

Most secondary staff reported behavioral concerns with students as hardships. In example, secondary school teachers noted that:

Having students come back for an extra class was very difficult at the middle school level. Students were often tardy and took quite a bit of effort to get them to take this seriously. In most cases you only had 10 minutes of class time the other portion was spent with discipline, tardiness, and inattentiveness.

The students were “done” by ninth period. Chaos reigned. It was a stressful time as well as the most dreaded period of the day.

*Students were not accountable when it came to attendance in this period (and in this year in general) since it did not have a separate attendance check. [...] There is some serious fatigue/lack of attention suffered by students and staff with the extra 30 minutes of instruction and I feel like my last period classes struggled at the end of the day. **Table 10, Figure 5 and Narrative Responses***

Communication. An overwhelming majority (89%, n= 428) of staff reported that the idea of lengthening the school day was clearly communicated to ACPS staff. Most staff (64%, n=311) agreed that it was clearly communicated to parents. Staff agreed that the strategy was communicated; however, staff narrative responses appeared that communication was faltered once the strategy was implemented at the different school buildings.

When the days went back to the normal schedule, parents were not informed at a [timely] manner. I had students showing up for the early time for many days at the start of the week.

Too many students were tardy, and many parents picked their children up early.

Several staff credited the opportunity to communicate about student progress to this additional time.

*Having more time to evaluate student performance, differentiate instruction and communicate with parents to improve student performance would be more valuable to me than additional time with students. **Tables 11-12***

Additional comments. Staff comments about the strategy were both applauses and concerns. Almost (46%) half of the respondents viewed the strategy as a waste of student time. Some staff viewed this strategy as a great alternative to traditional methods of making up lost instructional time due to emergency school closings.

It would be great if this could be a permanent change. The school day is far too short for everything that needs to be taught, particularly with all the extra programs and activities that students participate in throughout the school day. It was also a very effective way to include the necessary instruction time in without adding it to the end of the school year, which would have been far less effective.

Students who would not otherwise receive additional services, benefited from extra help from reading/ELL teachers. I did see improvements in academic achievement in these students.

As an educator, I appreciated the extra time with my students.

Staff suggested that the main difficulty with the strategy was the splitting of the time, not the idea of adding additional time.

Splitting up the 30 minutes into 10 minutes earlier and 20 minutes later was the prime reason why it was not effective. The 30 minutes should have been all together. It created a lot of schedule altering that would not have been necessary if it were 30 [continuous] minutes.

Make it mandatory to add the full 30 minutes to the end of the day. NOT the 10 in the beginning.

It was very confusing that the 30 extra minutes/day were broken up so that we started school ten minutes earlier and ended 20 minutes later. It would have been more effective to have the entire 30 minutes added to the end of the day instead.

Table 13 and Narrative Responses

Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this survey was to collect staff perceptions about the additional instructional time added to each school day. The results suggest that while some faced hardships, the general idea of adding instructional time to the school day ultimately benefited the students. The survey also points to the idea that adding the additional time was the most favored of the options presented before the ACPS School Board. Despite longer school days, additional instructional time, used effectively, improves student achievement⁴.

Effective instructional time is time in which students are participating in an approved course, curriculum, or educationally related activity⁵. However, in schools where the time is not used effectively, there are fewer benefits of having more time in school. Adding instructional time to current school calendars can help develop and advance students more effectively than adding additional years of schooling⁶. In addition to academic gains, social gains have been cited with adding additional time to the school day.

To ensure that schools are using instructional time effectively, it is recommended that school buildings create and share a general message of what constitutes an effective use of instructional time. Clear understanding about instructional time can increase the likelihood of students benefiting from longer school days. While the survey provides insight into staffs' perceptions of the benefits on student achievement, it is unclear if this additional time led to student academic gains. However, what is clear from the survey

feedback, and the trends in research related to instructional time and use, is that additional effective instructional time yields positive increases in student academic gains.

In general, most staff had favorable responses to the lengthened school day. However, differences were noted across school levels, and within schools. Staff had positive responses about the communication with ACPS staff and parents. A disconnect was seen between what staffs' personal thoughts were about the strategy and what they thought their colleagues thought of (or did) during the additional time. Most elementary staff had a favorable view of the strategy compared to the secondary school. Middle school staff were more likely to respond negatively to the impact of the lengthened school day on student achievement. Elementary teachers reported personal burdens as reasons for not embracing the strategy such as having younger children at home and fatigue for both themselves and students. Middle school staff responses were more concerned with behavioral disruptions with students being tardy for classes and being disruptive once joining classes. High school staff was positive about the opportunities to focus individual intervention for the students. The findings suggest the following recommendations may benefit the division in the event of future weather related school closings:

Continue efforts to collect feedback from all stakeholders. Continue current methods of surveying staff. Consider additional methods of collecting feedback from parents and students regarding their thoughts on the selected strategy.

Develop division level definition and understanding of the merits of using instructional time to support student achievement, and define what activities constitutes an effective use of instructional time.

TABLE 1
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Participants by School































1. What is your primary ACPS work location?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
John Adams Elementary	19	3.87%					
Charles Barrett Elementary	11	2.24%					
Patrick Henry Elementary	20	4.07%					
Jefferson-Houston Academy	22	4.48%					
Cora Kelly Elementary	25	5.09%					
Lyles-Crouch Academy	20	4.07%					
Douglas MacArthur Elementary	24	4.89%					
George Mason Elementary	15	3.05%					
Maury Elementary	13	2.65%					
Mount Vernon Community	20	4.07%					
James Polk Elementary	19	3.87%					
William Ramsay Elementary	28	5.70%					
Samuel W. Tucker Elementary	24	4.89%					
Francis Hammond I Middle	22	4.48%					
Francis Hammond II Middle	14	2.85%					
Francis Hammond III Middle	20	4.07%					
George Washington I Middle	15	3.05%					
George Washington II Middle	16	3.26%					
Minnie Howard Campus of T.C. Williams	30	6.11%					
T.C. Williams High	100	20.37%					
Interim Education Program	3	0.61%					
Other (please specify)	11	2.24%					
Total Responses	491		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

TABLE 2
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Participants by employee type

2. Which better describes your role in your school or location?					
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents		
A Classroom teacher	330	67.21%			
Other	165	33.60%			
Total Responses	495		20%	40%	60% 80% 100%

Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.

TABLE 3
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Grade for Overall Effort

3. What grade would you give the overall effort over the past two months to make-up the instructional time lost due to inclement weather?					
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents		
A	90	18.33%			
B	154	31.36%			
C	114	23.22%			
D	78	15.89%			
F	42	8.55%			
Don't know	13	2.65%			
Total Responses	491		20%	40%	60% 80% 100%

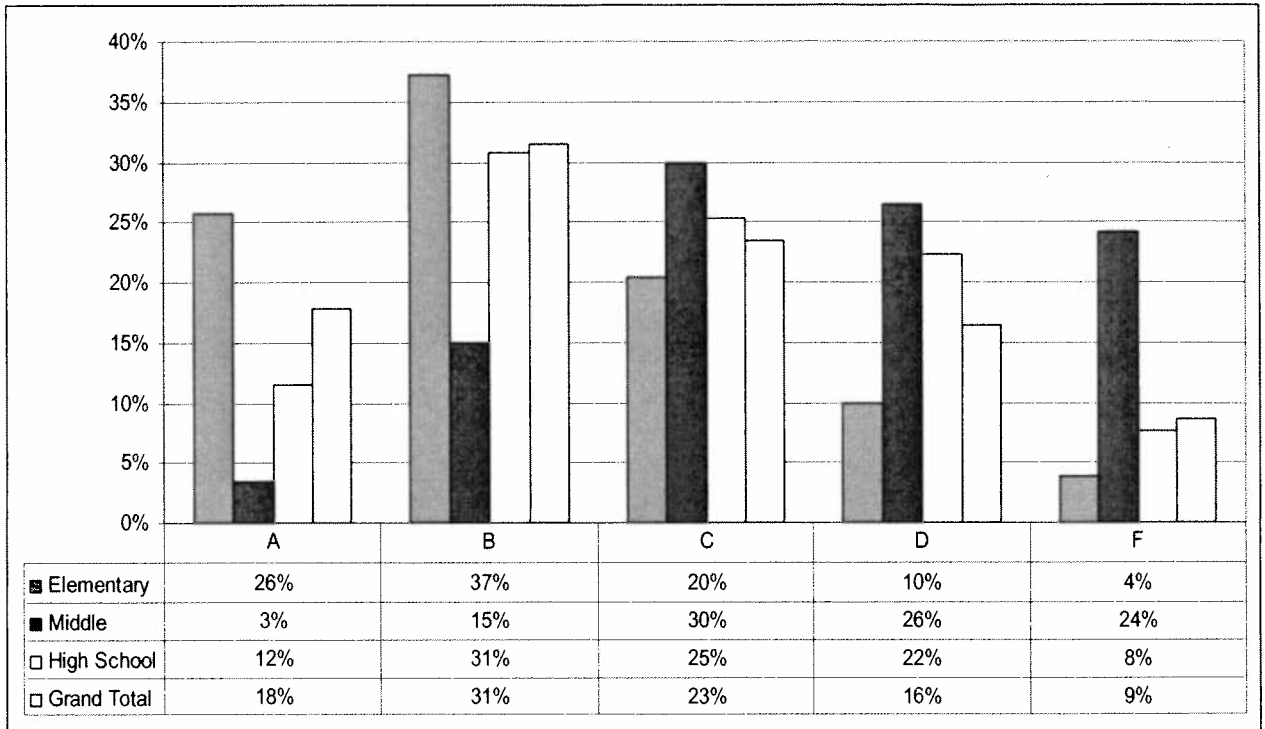


Figure 1: Lengthened school day overall grade by school level

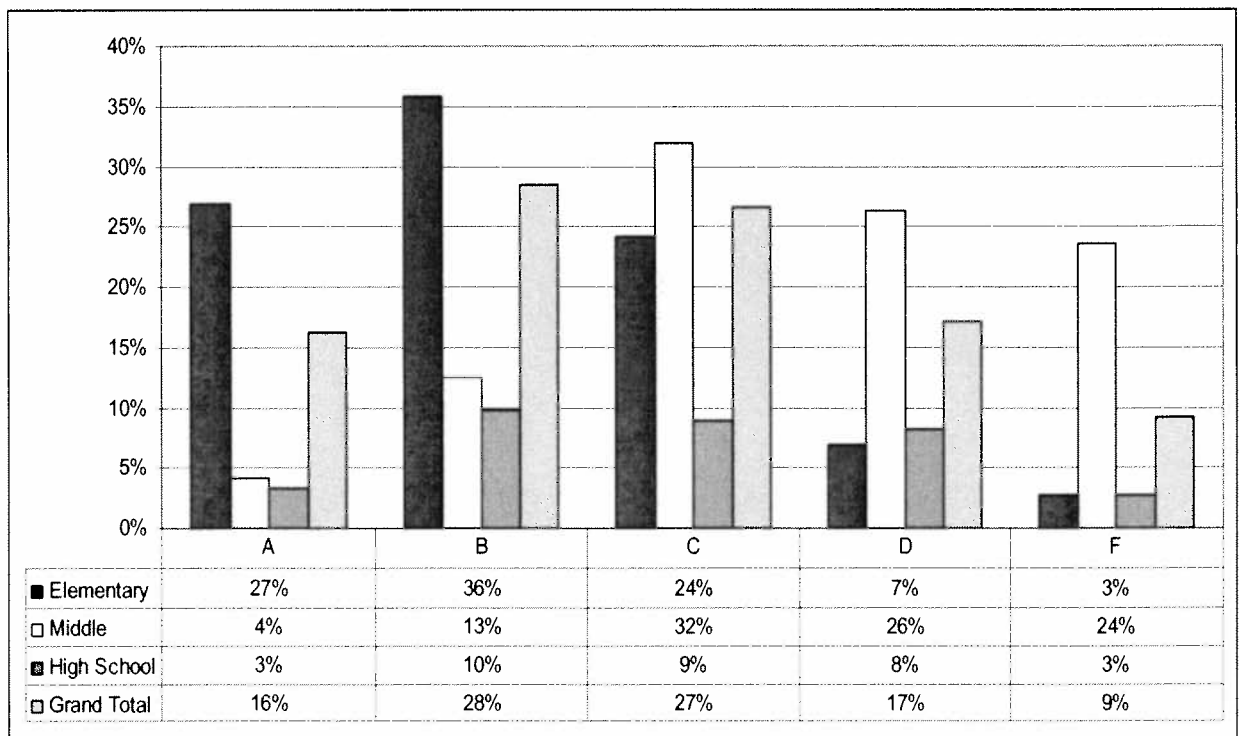


Figure 2: Classroom teachers only: Lengthened school day overall grade by school level

TABLE 4
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Colleagues: Grade for Overall Effort

4. What grade do you think your colleagues would give the overall effort over the past two months to make-up the instructional time lost due to inclement weather?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
A	52	10.66%					
B	114	23.36%					
C	130	26.64%					
D	90	18.44%					
F	57	11.68%					
Don't know	45	9.22%					
Total Responses	488		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

TABLE 5
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Effective for Student Achievement

5. How would you rate the effectiveness of the lengthened school day on student achievement?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
Very Effective	39	7.94%					
Effective	169	34.42%					
Ineffective	169	34.42%					
Very Ineffective	79	16.09%					
Don't Know	35	7.13%					
Total Responses	491		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

TABLE 6
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Increasing Student Achievement

6. Was the lengthened school day a good strategy to increase student achievement?				
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents	
Yes	167	34.15%		
No	242	49.49%		
Don't Know	80	16.36%		
Total Responses	489		20%	40% 60% 80% 100%

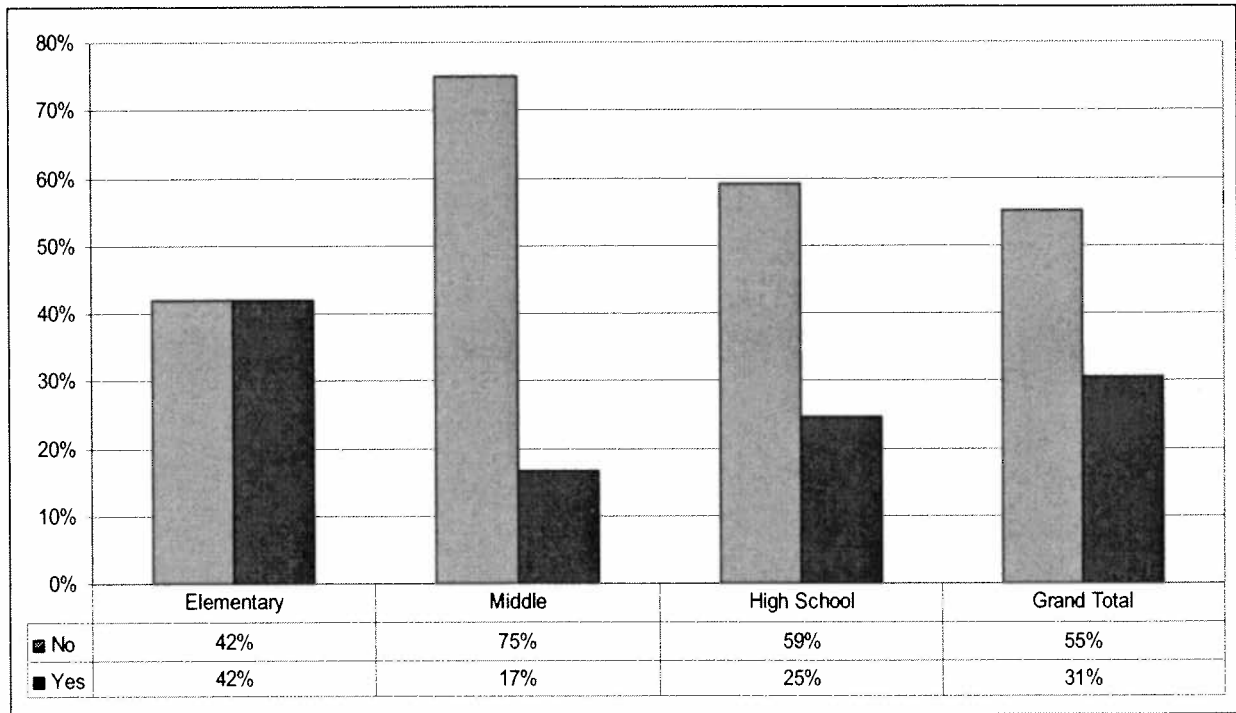


Figure 3: Classroom teachers only: Does the strategy increase student achievement?

TABLE 7
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Creative Use of Time

7. Do you feel you made creative use of the extra time to help students achieve?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
Yes	298	61.19%					
No	117	24.02%					
Don't Know	72	14.78%					
Total Responses	487		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

TABLE 8
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Colleagues: Creative Use of Time

9. Do you feel your school-based colleagues made creative use of the extra time to help students achieve?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
Yes	162	33.68%					
No	93	19.33%					
Don't Know	215	44.70%					
Not Applicable	11	2.29%					
Total Responses	481		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

TABLE 9
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Embracing the Strategy

12. Did most of the staff at your school embrace the strategy of lengthening the school day?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
Yes	148	30.39%					
No	171	35.11%					
Don't Know	165	33.88%					
Not Applicable	3	0.62%					
Total Responses	487		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

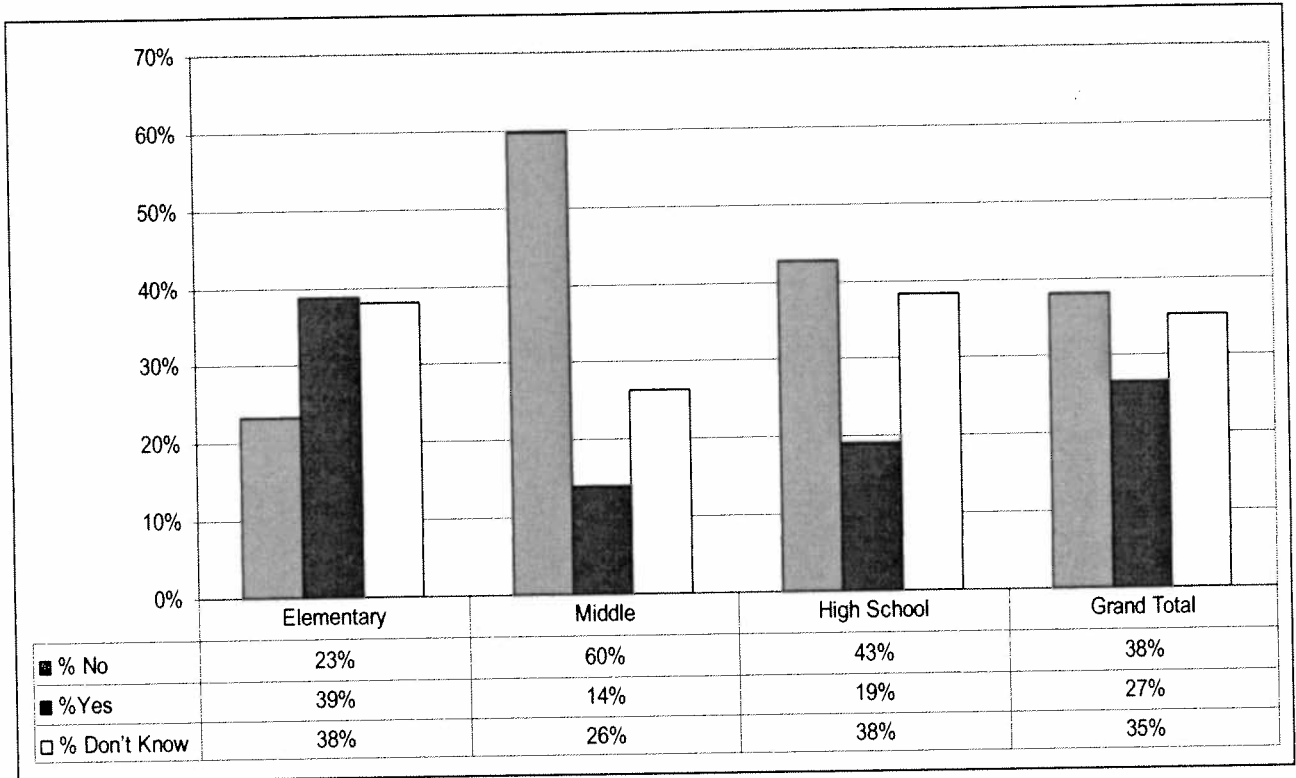


Figure 4: Classroom teachers only: Did most of the staff at your school embrace the strategy of lengthening the school day?

**TABLE 10
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Personal Hardships**

11. Did the lengthening of the school day cause you any personal hardship?				
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents	
Yes	210	44.03%	[Bar chart showing 44.03%]	
No	267	55.97%	[Bar chart showing 55.97%]	
Total Responses	477		20%	40% 60% 80% 100%

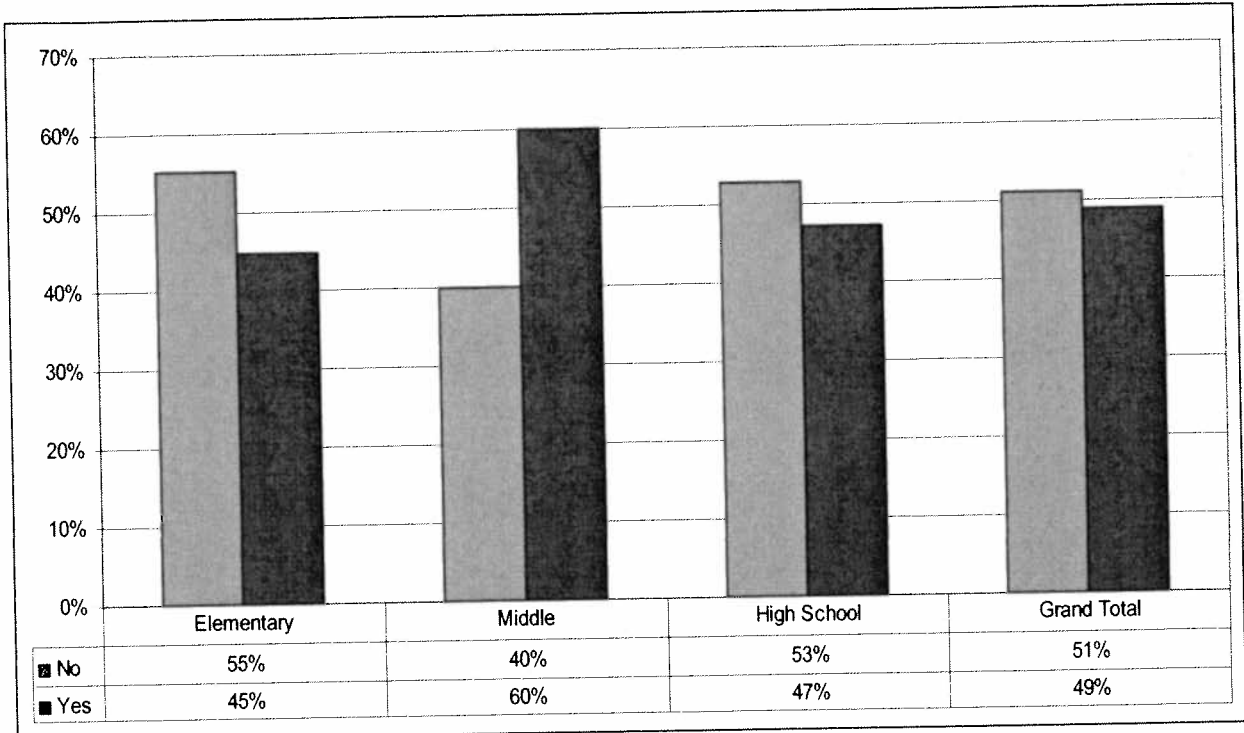


Figure 5: Classroom teachers only: Did the lengthening of the school day cause you any personal hardship?

TABLE 11
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Communication

13. Was the idea (lengthening the day) clearly communicated to ACPS staff?				
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents	
Yes	428	89.17%	[Bar chart showing 89.17%]	
No	45	9.38%	[Bar chart showing 9.38%]	
Don't Know	7	1.46%	[Bar chart showing 1.46%]	
Total Responses	480		20%	40% 60% 80% 100%

TABLE 12
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Parent Communication







14. Was the idea (lengthening the day) clearly communicated to parents?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
Yes	311	63.73%					
No	39	7.99%					
Don't Know	138	28.28%					
Total Responses	488		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

TABLE 13
Alexandria City Public Schools
Lengthened School Day Survey Results: 2010
Student Time

15. Was the lengthened day a waste of student time?							
Responses	Count	%	Percentage of total respondents				
Yes	173	35.67%					
No	222	45.77%					
Don't Know	90	18.56%					
Total Responses	485		20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

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