

Lengthened School Day Survey – 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.