

# **MAXIMIZING INSTRUCTIONAL TIME: Identifying Impediments and Strategies**

## **Survey Results and Recommendations**

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# **MAXIMIZING INSTRUCTIONAL TIME: Identifying Impediments and Strategies**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this report is to provide the School Board with information for one of its 2005-2006 annual goals which is to “increase support for teachers and administrators that will assist schools in maximizing the use of instructional time.” The findings in this report were based on a divisionwide survey developed with the input of teachers and administrators from randomly selected schools. The survey responses are presented for the entire division, by school level (e.g., elementary, middle, high), and by position type (e.g., core teachers, non-core teachers, special education teachers, specialists, and building administrators). This report summarizes the extent to which various issues were impediments to instructional time, suggested strategies from teachers and administrators for addressing the impediments, and recommendations for addressing impediments.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Ten categories of instructional impediments were identified based on focus groups with eight randomly selected schools. The impediment categories identified included assessment and testing; class size and composition; equipment, technology, and materials; facilities; interruptions; planning time issues; recordkeeping and paperwork; scheduling and pacing; staffing; and student behavior.
- The categories that emerged as top impediment areas as perceived by teachers and building administrators included student behavior, planning time issues, class size and composition, assessment and testing, and recordkeeping and paperwork. Although the remaining categories did not emerge as top impediments overall, there were individual survey items within several of the categories that did emerge as moderate or large impediments.

### **Student Behavior - Findings**

- Across all of the division’s respondents, the largest percentage chose student behavior as one of their top three impediment categories. For all of the respondent groups except elementary schools overall and special education teachers, student behavior was selected as a top impediment by the largest percentage of respondents. For special education teachers and elementary school respondents overall, student behavior was their third highest rated impediment area.

- Within the category of student behavior, a majority of the division’s respondents thought that the following items represented moderate or large impediments: needing to redirect students to keep them on task, students coming to class unprepared, addressing and resolving student misbehavior, and disruptions in class due to student behavior. In addition, the majority of middle and high school respondents and core teachers indicated that preparing work for students who miss class (e.g., due to absences or in-school suspension) was a moderate or large impediment. A majority of high school respondents and building administrators indicated that student tardiness was also a moderate or large impediment.
- When asked to provide strategies for addressing impediments related to student behavior, the most frequently cited strategies included: increasing student and parent accountability; increasing administrative support for discipline; implementing and applying clear discipline policies consistently; and implementing stricter attendance and tardiness policies.

### **Student Behavior - Recommendations**

- Review research and policies related to increasing student and parent accountability with respect to student behavior and learning with the goal of implementing strategies to assist in this area.
- Provide ongoing instruction to students concerning their role in the educational process with an emphasis on self-regulation (e.g., student accountability and responsibility in the learning process, making positive choices).
- Examine referral trends within each school and compare it to the climate within the school as perceived by teachers, students, and administrators to assist schools in creating the best possible environment that is safe and conducive to learning.
- Form a division-level committee composed of teachers, building administrators, and central office staff to develop a comprehensive plan of action for proactively addressing student misbehavior at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

### **Planning Time Issues - Findings**

- Across the division, the impediment category associated with the second highest percentage of respondents involved planning time issues. At the elementary school level, the largest percentage of respondents chose planning time issues as the category that represented one of their top three impediments. Planning time issues represented the second highest impediment category for middle school respondents, core teachers, and special education teachers.
- Within the area of planning time, a majority of the division’s respondents indicated that the following items represented moderate or large impediments to the effective use of instructional time: reliability of equipment used during planning time (e.g., copiers and risographs), inadequate individual planning time, and loss of planning time (e.g., due to

meetings or committee work). In addition, a majority of middle and high school respondents and special education teachers indicated that inadequate time for collaboration with other teachers and school personnel represented a moderate or large impediment. A majority of special education teachers also perceived the frequency of progress reports to be a moderate or large impediment.

- When asked to provide strategies for addressing impediments related to planning time, the most frequently cited strategies included: providing additional copiers for use during planning time, increasing or protecting existing individual planning time, hiring additional staff to assist with non-instructional duties (e.g., photocopying, hall duty, paperwork), changing the frequency and format of progress reports, and creating additional teacher work space.

### **Planning Time Issues - Recommendations**

- Review results of the most recent divisionwide study of copiers and other equipment, including the condition, quantity, and technological capabilities of the equipment. Use the information gathered from the study to increase the availability of copiers in schools and ensure that the distribution is equitable across the division and within each school.
- At the division level and within each school, develop policies and practices that protect teachers' individual planning time to the same degree that students' instructional time is protected and ensure that planning time is used appropriately.

### **Class Size and Composition - Findings**

- The third largest percentage of all respondents across the division indicated that the category of class size and composition represented one of their top three impediments. This category was also rated as one of the three top impediments by relatively large percentages of respondents at the middle and high school levels and respondents who were core teachers, non-core teachers, and specialists.
- Within the category of class size and composition, a majority of the division's respondents thought that the following items were moderate or large impediments: students with a wide range of abilities within a class, the number of students in the class is too large, and inclusion of students with certain disabilities without sufficient support or resources. In addition, the majority of middle and high school respondents and non-core teachers thought that students enrolled in classes they are not interested in taking (e.g., lack of motivation or interest) was a moderate or large impediment.
- When asked to provide strategies for addressing impediments related to class size and composition, the most frequently cited strategies included: reducing class sizes; providing more special education assistance or assistants in the classroom, especially at the elementary school level; and developing and enforcing standards for enrollment in advanced classes or advanced placement (AP) classes at the secondary level.

## **Class Size and Composition - Recommendations**

- Conduct an in-depth review of class sizes at each school based on a variety of methods (e.g., pupil teacher ratio, average class size, distribution of actual class sizes) to determine the extent to which class sizes and teaching loads are evenly distributed. Use the results to determine if and where imbalances exist with the goal of balancing class sizes and teaching loads as needed. Based on the results, determine whether any class size adjustments should be considered, especially at the middle school level.
- Consider the level of individual student needs when determining the number of special education students placed in an inclusion classroom setting and adjust assistance in the classroom accordingly.
- Continue to provide quality staff development for teachers and building administrators with an emphasis on the inclusion model and differentiated instruction within the classroom. Review evaluations of the training offered in these areas to augment future training based on the specific needs of teachers and building administrators.
- Refine, enforce, and communicate guidelines for enrolling students in advanced classes. Develop strategies for assisting students interested in pursuing advanced coursework who may not be adequately prepared and ensure that parents and students have knowledge of those available opportunities.

## **Assessment and Testing - Findings**

- Across all elementary school respondents, assessment and testing was the second most frequently selected impediment category. This area was also the second most frequently selected area among specialists and building administrators.
- Within the category of assessment and testing, a majority of the division's respondents thought that the following items represented moderate or large impediments: amount and frequency of required testing (e.g., local, state, and national tests), length of time required to administer a given test (e.g., number of items on test), and the testing schedule/calendar (e.g., tests scheduled too early/loss of time in June, overlapping of test times).
- When asked to provide strategies for addressing impediments related to assessment and testing, the most frequently cited strategies included: reducing the amount of testing (e.g., local assessments), and making changes to the scheduling and administration of tests (e.g., schedule later in the year, provide more flexibility in the testing windows).

## **Assessment and Testing - Recommendations**

- At the division level, review and communicate the philosophy, purpose, and intended use of the local assessments with the goal of maximizing the efficiency and utility of the local assessments.

- As online testing increases, investigate the feasibility of conducting SOL testing later in the school year. If the timing of the tests cannot be altered, investigate offering students mini-curriculum units after SOL testing that are based on their interests.
- Create a committee composed of school- and division-level staff to develop and communicate an annual divisionwide testing schedule that takes into account the academic calendar, local, state, and national tests.

### **Recordkeeping and Paperwork - Findings**

- Recordkeeping and paperwork was identified by a majority of high school respondents as one of their top three impediments. In addition, this category was identified as one of the top three impediment areas by non-core teachers, special education teachers, and building administrators.
- Within the category of recordkeeping and paperwork, two items were rated by a majority of respondents as a moderate or large impediment. A majority of high school respondents thought that student attendance recordkeeping and documentation was a moderate or large impediment, and a majority of special education teachers and building administrators thought that special education-related meetings and documentation was an impediment.
- When asked to provide strategies for addressing impediments related to recordkeeping and paperwork, strategies were dependent on school level. At the elementary school level, the most frequently-cited strategies included: hiring assistants to help with recordkeeping and paperwork or using office or other building staff to assist with these tasks. At the high school and middle school levels, the most frequently-mentioned strategies centered on making changes to the student attendance process to reduce the impact of recordkeeping and documentation.

### **Recordkeeping and Paperwork - Recommendations**

- Hire additional staff to assist special education teachers with both non-instructional duties (e.g., recordkeeping and paperwork) and instructional duties as needed. Investigate feasible options for distributing the additional staff in an equitable manner.
- Review the attendance process, especially at the high school level, including possible changes that could be made to the process to ensure that attendance data are gathered in the most efficient manner possible.

### **Additional Identified Impediments - Findings**

- Across all high school respondents, a majority rated the reliability of technology (e.g., difficulty logging on, slow performance, computers in need of repair) as a moderate or large impediment. An examination of responses by position at the high school level revealed that a majority of each teacher group rated this item as a moderate or large impediment.

- Within the area of facilities, a majority of middle and high school respondents thought that the need to share classrooms with other teachers (e.g., teaching on a cart, inability to set up/prepare rooms, or access materials) was a moderate or large impediment to the effective use of instructional time.
- The academic calendar (e.g., instructional days too close to major holidays, schedule of staff days) and the pacing of curriculum (e.g., too much material to cover in a short period of time, not enough depth) were two items within the scheduling and pacing impediment category that were rated as moderate or large impediments by a majority of respondents.
- A majority of middle school respondents thought that one item related to staffing, the quality of substitutes, was a moderate or large impediment to the effective use of instructional time.

### **Additional Identified Impediments - Recommendations**

- Continue the ongoing review of technology replacement standards and communicate the replacement plan to teachers and building administrators.
- Have secondary schools review their building utilization with the purpose of providing teachers who do not have their own class space with adequate workspace for planning.
- Review the academic calendar, including instructional days too close to major holidays, and consider whether the calendar allows for the most effective use of scheduled instructional time.
- Continue to review pacing of the curriculum at the division level to ensure that adequate time is provided for student understanding of curriculum objectives.
- Review standards for substitutes, refine the screening process, and implement a mechanism for evaluating substitutes to retain the most qualified substitutes. In addition, provide incentives for substitutes to participate in ongoing training opportunities that reinforce expectations, responsibilities, and effective classroom strategies.

### **Overall Recommendation**

- Have the appropriate departments collaborate to examine the results and recommendations from this report in detail to address the recommendations and investigate the cost implications.