Time to Learn Strategy

Instructional Time and Semestering
Time to Learn Strategy: Instructional Time and Semestersing

Background

Time and the way it is used are at the centre of the challenge to improve student learning and achievement. Research clearly states that time-on-learning is an important determiner of student success in school. The Time to Learn strategy centres on the importance of ensuring that, at every grade level, students and teachers use available instructional time effectively and productively. Increasing the quality of instructional time is key to improving student learning and achievement in all program areas and at all grade levels. In program areas targeted for significant improvement in student achievement, such as mathematics and literacy, increasing the quantity of instructional time, as well as the quality, is an important factor in improving opportunities for learning.

To date, Time to Learn initiatives have centred on maximizing and optimizing the amount of time that teachers spend on delivering the prescribed curriculum. The introduction of learning outcomes frameworks in most subject areas has focussed more attention on the importance of effective program planning and delivery to ensure that the all dimensions of the program and the full range of prescribed outcomes are addressed in the time allocated. There remains much work to be done in this area.

The introduction of a common school calendar (September 2000), in addition to standardizing dates for schools to open, close, and take holiday breaks, has addressed concerns at the high school level regarding the loss of instructional time because of extended examination breaks and early graduation. In addition, boards have taken steps to address the issue of instructional time lost because of non-curricular activities and are continuing to monitor schools in this regard.

The Department and school boards continue to investigate and discuss alternative ways of organizing the school year for students and teachers, and to review the research on the advantages and disadvantages of models used in other jurisdictions (year-round schooling, for example). The Department and school boards continue also to address the ongoing challenge of finding adequate and appropriate time (and funding) for scheduling in-service education and other professional development programs to meet the needs of the system, school staffs, and individual teachers while minimizing the loss of time in the classroom.

The recommendations presented in this paper relate to allotment of available instructional time to priority program areas and to effective semestersing and scheduling practices. They reflect the commitment of the Department to

- improve the quality of learning and student achievement
- ensure that students have increased opportunities for learning in priority areas, notably literacy and mathematics
- provide teachers and students with blocks of uninterrupted instructional time long enough (but not too long) to engage students in active and interactive learning
provide opportunities for all senior high students to earn credits toward graduation each semester, thus increasing motivation of potential “early leavers” to stay in school and facilitating re-entry of “early leavers” to resume their formal education.

provide design options that allow some courses to be offered year long to meet students’ learning needs.

Guiding Principles

Students need “time to learn.” Teachers need “time to teach.” Time is a resource that can be used to create additional learning opportunities for students and additional teaching opportunities for teachers.

It is critical to use time in the most efficient way to provide students every possible opportunity to be successful—dissecting the instructional day into small chunks of time is not in students’ best interests.

The Department and school boards will continue initiatives to help teachers and students use time in new, different, and better ways.

Greater uniformity in the structure of the school year and consistency in organizational structures will respond to the needs of transfer students and the concerns of their parents.

Issues

Schools, administrators, teachers, parents, and students have varying belief systems about the relative merits and benefits of non-semestered, partially semestered, and fully semestered structures.

Variation in school circumstances such as staffing availability and subject area expertise have an impact on the school’s ability to deliver the public school program effectively and to meet student and administration needs.

Recommendations: Instructional Time Grades Primary–6

That allotment of instructional time for grades primary–6 reflect the identification of mathematics and literacy as program priorities.

That 45 minutes Math Time every day be a guideline for program planning in grades primary–2, beginning September 2002 (represents 20% of instructional time).

That 60 minutes Math Time every day be a guideline for program planning in grades 3–6, beginning September 2002 (represents 21% of instructional time).

That Math Time for grades 1–6 include 5 minutes per day of “Mental Math.”
• That 90–100 minutes every day be a guideline for planning the language arts program in grades primary–2, beginning September 2002 (represents 40–44% of instructional time).

• That 90–120 minutes every day be a guideline for planning the language arts program in grades 3–6, beginning September 2002 (represents 32–42% of instructional time).

• That within time designated for language arts in grades primary–3, a minimum of 60 minutes be designated as Active Reading Hour (implemented in September 2000).

• That every class, grades 4–6, include in its daily schedule one or more blocks of Learn to Read/Read to Learn Time totalling a minimum of 60 minutes, beginning in September 2002.

• That the Department and boards work together (through the Education Program Committee) to provide guidelines for time allotment to other subject areas to ensure a reasonable and productive balance of available time (guidelines to be available by September 2002).

• That boards and their schools develop a strategy to provide 30 minutes per day for physical education/physical activity programs for grades primary–6.

Recommendations: Instructional Time Grades 7–12

• That boards and their schools review time for learning in grades 7–9 in priority areas:
  — mathematics (Goal: 60 minutes per day, represents 20% of instructional time)
  — language arts and opportunities for literacy learning in other subject areas (part of Active Readers initiative to be introduced in grade 7 in 2002–03)
  — physical education and physical activity programs

• That boards continue to address the issue of instructional time lost because of non-curricular activities and to monitor schools in this regard.

• That boards hold high schools accountable for scheduling for grades 10–12 that provides opportunity for a minimum of 110 hours instructional time per credit.

• That schools consider the following model for organizing instructional time for grades 10–12:
  — 5 periods per day
  — 60-minute periods
  — 110 periods provide opportunity for the minimum instructional time required per credit.
  — 55 periods provide opportunity for the minimum instructional time required per half-credit
— 187 days – 9 days for examinations = 178 days per year, 89 days per semester
— 178 days x 5 periods = 890 hours instructional time per year ÷ 8 credits = 111 hours per credit

› That the instructional program for grades 10–12 include for each course direction and support for home study to make provision for school days lost because of storms, etc.

_recommendations: Semstering Grades 10–12_

› That boards and their schools work toward consistency in semetering practices with a two-year phase in beginning 2002–03 (Goal is consistency by 2004–05).

› That year-long options be explored/provided for some compulsory credits (notably English/French language arts, mathematics).

— That the Department and Boards continue to monitor the effectiveness of Mathematics 10 Plus and Mathematics Foundations 10 Plus as 220-hour, two-credit, year-long options.

— That a similar model be explored for English/French language arts at the grade 10 level for students who require additional support in literacy.

— That options be explored to provide additional time for grade 12 courses for which there is a Nova Scotia examination.