



21 November 2005

Report #05-252 to Education Committee

Re: Report on the Evaluation of the Balanced School Day Project

ORIGINATORS: Jennifer Adams, Superintendent of Instruction
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PURPOSE:

1. To present the report on the evaluation of the Balanced School Day project.

BACKGROUND:

2. In September 2004, the *Balanced School Day* (BSD) schedule was implemented at two elementary schools in the OCDSB. In contrast to the traditional school schedule, the BSD schedule features three uninterrupted blocks of instructional time rather than four, divided by two nutrition and physical activity breaks that range from 40-50 minutes each.
3. In reaching the decision to implement the BSD pilot program, Superintendents and Principals engaged in discussions with school councils, staff, federation members, students and school communities. A committee, consisting of the administrators of the pilot schools, senior board administrators, and district staff, was established in early 2004, which met on an ongoing basis to address challenges faced by schools implementing the pilot.
4. The committee made a request to evaluate the possible impact of the BSD schedule on the pilot school communities. At that time, a literature review related to the BSD was compiled by staff in the Quality Assurance Division which provided an overview of the components of the BSD program, and examined research conducted by other districts across Ontario¹. The paper also provided a critique of district-level conceptual and empirical literature on the Balanced School Day, and made a series of recommendations for the implementation of the BSD program in the OCDSB.
5. In July 2004, the Quality Assurance Division was asked to assist the committee by developing surveys to gather aggregated data on parent, teacher and student perceptions of the Balanced School Day schedule. Staff in Quality Assurance consulted with principals from the pilot schools, and developed an evaluation plan for monitoring the implementation of the program in OCDSB schools. It was decided that a repeated measures design (i.e., pre-test and post-test surveys) would be the best approach to evaluate the impact of the BSD program on schools.
6. In the summer of 2004, a provincial research consortium was also established with several other school boards across the province (public and Catholic) to discuss issues related to the BSD. Each of these boards had schools operating on, or investigating the implementation of, the Balanced School Day. The mandate of the consortium was to study the Balanced School Day schedule to ensure its effectiveness within schools and to contribute to the research knowledge base across the province. Results from respective district research efforts, as well as the tools and practices used to gather information, have been shared via email, and through consortium meetings.

¹ Lock, C., Literature Review related to The Balanced School Day, OCDSB

7. In an effort to develop evaluation instruments which were consistent with what was used in other districts, and to ensure comparability of results across the province, permission was sought from the Hamilton-Wentworth DSB to adapt their survey tools for use in OCDSB schools.

STATUS:

8. The program has been operating for a full year in Viscount Alexander Public School and Le Phare Elementary School. In September 2005, two additional schools, Regina Street Public School and Meadowlands Public School, have opted to follow the BSD schedule.
9. The executive summary of the report of the evaluation from the first full year of implementation (i.e. 2004-2005) is attached as Appendix A. Additional background information is available upon request.

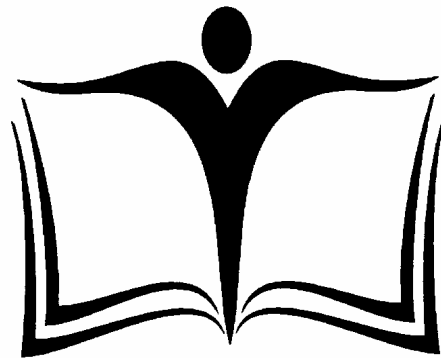
SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:

10. In essence, the overall results from this evaluation tend to support findings from other school districts in Ontario that have implemented the Balanced School Day Schedule. Specifically, that the Balanced School Day schedule can have a positive impact on student learning as a result of: (i) increased instructional time, (ii) balanced nutrition and physical activity, and (iii) reduction in transition times.
11. We need to recognize, however, that these results are based on two very small schools within our district, both of which offer different programs (i.e., one was a French immersion centre, the other a single-track English/Core French centre) and serve very different communities.
12. Despite the limitations of this research (i.e., small sample size, different program offerings), the findings from this evaluation, and research conducted by other school boards in Ontario, would support the expanded implementation of the Balanced School Day schedule in the OCDSB. Staff will continue to work with school communities who show an interest in moving to a Balanced School Day schedule.
13. Staff acknowledges the need for continued evaluation of the Balanced School Day in the OCDSB. As more schools implement this program delivery model, it will be worthwhile to administer the BSD survey to gather additional perceptual data. In addition, student achievement data may be combined with the perceptual data to provide a more fulsome picture of the impact of the BSD on student learning. Thus, staff will consider administering this instrument in all participating BSD schools during the 2006-2007 school year.

SUBMITTED FOR INFORMATION

Lorne M. Rachlis
Director of Education/
Secretary of the Board

Jennifer Adams
Superintendent of Instruction



**OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

**Final Report on the Evaluation
of the Balanced School Day
Pilot Project**

Executive Summary

Prepared By
Quality Assurance Division
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

November 2005

Executive Summary

In September 2004, the *Balanced School Day* (BSD) schedule was implemented at two elementary schools in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), Le Phare Elementary School and Viscount Alexander Public School. In an effort to monitor the impact of the BSD pilot on school communities, the Quality Assurance Division was asked to evaluate the program by gathering data on parent, teacher and student perceptions of the BSD. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the Balanced School Day schedule, the framework used for the evaluation, and a summary of the major findings from the pilot.

Overview

The growth of the Balanced School Day in Ontario has been rapid over the past four years. At first, the implementation of the program occurred in only a few schools within any given district (e.g., Avon Maitland District School Board, Peel District School Board, and the Thames Valley School Board). Recently, however, the Halton District School Board and the Waterloo Region District School Board have implemented the BSD system-wide. In contrast to the traditional school schedule, the BSD schedule features three 100 minute blocks of instructional time, divided by two nutrition and physical activity breaks, ranging from 40-50 minutes each. Both schedules provide for exactly the same amount of instructional time (i.e., 300 minutes). Proponents of the Balanced School Day argue that this type of schedule supports learning in the classroom by introducing a different timetable that is: i) more balanced for students in terms of nutrition and physical activity; and, ii) offers longer periods of uninterrupted instructional blocks.

Evaluation Framework

Unique in its approach, the OCDSB pilot evaluation used a repeated measures design where parents and teachers were each invited to voluntarily complete a survey twice (i.e. before and after implementation). The surveys were distributed in September 2004 and May 2005, and data analysis was conducted during the summer of 2005. Students were surveyed only once in May 2005. Respondents were asked several questions; however, two main questions were common to all three groups: i) satisfaction with the BSD after implementation, and ii) desire to follow the BSD schedule next year. Parents and teachers were also asked about the most effective components of the program, and their concerns with the program. In addition, several other perceptual variables were examined which can be considered under the purview of the four main assumptions of the BSD: i) more efficient scheduling; ii) improved student learning; iii) balanced nutrition; and iv) improved health & physical activity.

Response Rates

The *response rate* represents the number or percentage of individuals within a target group that respond to a given survey. All surveys aim for a high response rate to help ensure that the results are representative. The overall response rate for the BSD pilot evaluation ranged from a low of 16% (parent post-survey) to a high of 92% on the student surveys (see Table 1 below). Given the low response rate on the parent post-survey, analysis of certain questions of interest was limited. Further, the type of program in which the child was enrolled limited the interpretability of the results. For example, one school offered French Immersion and one school did not. Similarly, the distribution of students by grade limited the interpretability of the results because students in grade one would have nothing to which they can compare the BSD schedule.

Table 1 BSD Survey Response Rates

School	Parent Survey				Teacher Survey				Student Survey			
	Pre		Post		Pre		Post		Primary		Junior	
<i>Le Phare</i>	67	21%	54	17%	8	50%	11	69%	87	96%	115	88%
<i>Viscount Alexander</i>	53	33%	21	13%	11	92%	9	75%	61	86%	51	98%
Total	120		75		19		20		148		166	
Overall Response Rate	24%		16%		68%		71%		92%		91%	

Major Findings

The results of the evaluation were presented in two parts: i) Part A examined responses to common questions such as overall satisfaction with the BSD; ii) Part B examined the implementation of the schedule in terms of the four main assumptions discussed above. Where applicable, results from research conducted in other school districts were included. The major findings from the evaluation were as follows:

Part (A) Common Questions

Satisfaction with the BSD:

Overall, the majority of parents and teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the BSD schedule after implementation (67% and 63%, respectively). Although the majority of students (57%) were dissatisfied with the BSD schedule after implementation, most parents (55%) and teachers (58%) indicated that they would like to continue following the BSD schedule next year.

Benefits of the BSD:

The main benefits of the BSD according to parents were “increased instructional time” (pre-survey) and “better nutrition” (post-survey). For teachers the most important component of the BSD both prior to and post-implementation was the longer instructional block. In fact, 50% of all teachers noted this aspect to be a particular benefit of the BSD schedule. The decrease in transition times as a result of the new schedule was also perceived to be of great benefit to teachers.

Concerns with the BSD:

Parents reported several concerns with the BSD including: i) amount of time for lunch and disruption to student eating patterns; ii) amount of time for outside play; and iii) longer instructional blocks. Teachers also identified several challenges including: i) the negative impact of longer instructional blocks on student concentration, particularly at the primary level; ii) the difficulties with respect to adjusting to the new schedule; iii) the change in student eating patterns; and iv) the negative impact on classroom preparation time and supervisory duties.

Nevertheless, teachers identified several strategies which they used to overcome the challenges identified above including: i) communicating with parents to ensure that students had an adequate amount of healthy food for both nutritional breaks; ii) changing their instructional practices in order to engage students for the entire instructional block; and iii) taking the time to collaborate with colleagues in order to properly adjust to the new schedule.

Part (B) Four Main Assumptions

Results from the evaluation showed that:

Efficient Scheduling

- The amount of time required to prepare for recess, as well as for students to get to their desk after the bell rang, decreased in both the Spring and Winter months. That is, the proportion of teachers reporting 4-6 minutes as the required amount of time to prepare for recess decreased in both the Spring and Winter months under the BSD schedule (25% and 8%, respectively). Also, the proportion of teachers reporting 1-3 minutes as the required amount of time for students to get to their desk increased under the BSD in the Spring (7% vs. 61%) and Winter (i.e. 0% vs. 39%).
- 38% of students found the school day long under the BSD schedule;
- 78% of Le Phare parents felt the schedule made no difference in student attendance; however, 46% Viscount Alexander parents felt that it had improved.
- The BSD did not increase either frequency or duration of teacher supervision duties (i.e., over 90% of teachers reported that they had 6-8 supervision duties assigned per week under both schedules). Also, the number of minutes that teachers spent performing duties did not change significantly under the BSD schedule either, with the majority of teachers (72%) performing 81-120 minutes of duty per week, after implementation.

Improved Student Learning:

- A large proportion of parents and teachers from both schools felt that student learning was better under the BSD as compared to the traditional schedule (40% and 65%, respectively).
- 74% of teachers were able to maximize the longer instructional blocks within the second term;
- 53% of teachers believed student concentration was better under the BSD schedule; these findings were consistent across time. The proportion of teachers, however, who felt that student concentration was better under the traditional schedule increased by 26% after implementation, while the proportion who felt that there was “no difference” decreased by approximately the same amount.

Balanced Nutrition:

- The majority of teachers found that the amount and type of food students ate was better under the BSD as compared to the traditional schedule. According to teachers, student eating patterns normalized after a short adjustment period.
- The majority of parents at Le Phare felt the schedule made “no difference” to their child’s hunger level, or nutrition (40% and 47%, respectively). Viscount Alexander parents, however, felt that the BSD was “better” or “much better” for their child’s hunger (46%), and their child’s nutrition (65%);
- 47% of all students reported being hungry after school; whereas 52% reported that they had enough time to eat their lunch under the BSD schedule.

Improved Physical Activity and Health:

- 20% of teachers indicated that students’ extracurricular activities were better under the BSD as compared to the traditional schedule. The majority of students at both schools (51%), however, reported that they had enough time to participate in extracurricular activities.
- The majority of teachers (60%) felt that two supervised playtimes were sufficient for students to become involved in playground activities. Also, very few students (25%) reported that they did not have enough time to play outside.
- 55% of teachers, compared to only 21% of parents, felt that student behaviour was better under the BSD as compared to the traditional schedule. In fact, teachers in both schools reported that the number of reportable playground incidents declined under the BSD schedule.
- Overall, 63% of parents felt that the BSD made “no difference” on their children’s behaviour; however, the results on this variable varied by school, where 53% of Viscount Alexander parents felt that student behaviour was better and 71% of Le Phare parents felt that it made “no difference”.
- Other factors which varied by school included: student stress; student health and student happiness, where the majority of Viscount Alexander parent respondents saw improvements under the BSD and the majority of Le Phare parent respondents felt that there was no difference when compared to the traditional schedule.

Summary of Major Findings and Conclusions

Results from this evaluation suggest that the majority of parent and teacher respondents in both pilot schools were optimistic about the BSD before implementation and satisfied with the schedule after implementation. Further, most parents and teachers indicated that they would like to continue following the BSD schedule in 2005-2006. Students, however, were not as satisfied as parents or teachers with the BSD schedule. School-level results suggest that parents at Viscount Alexander were more satisfied with the BSD schedule than those at Le Phare.

The main benefits of the BSD, as identified by parents, changed over time from increased instructional time to better nutritional practices. One of the most significant challenges that teachers identified under the BSD schedule was associated with the longer instructional blocks in terms of keeping students engaged for 100 continuous minutes. This may have its roots in the fact that French Immersion sites deliver instruction differently than regular English program/core French sites. Nevertheless, teacher perceptions of not being able to maximize the longer instructional blocks dissipated after the first year of implementation. In fact, the majority of teachers indicated they were able to address this challenge within the 1st term of implementation. Moreover, the majority of teachers felt that student learning was better under the BSD.

The assumption that the BSD offers efficiency gains in terms of transition times was also supported by the results obtained in this study. Although the results from the pilot are not clear regarding teacher perceptions of the available time for students to participate in extracurricular activities, most students reported having enough time to participate in teams or clubs under the BSD schedule. Further, results from the pilot showed that the BSD did not increase either the number of teacher supervision duties assigned, or the amount of time teachers spent on supervision duties. Overall results showed that although most parents felt that the BSD made no difference to student behaviour, the majority of teachers felt it was better when compared to the traditional schedule. Further, the majority of parents and teachers indicated that the BSD made no difference to student stress levels or student happiness; however, parents at Viscount Alexander felt that student happiness was better after implementation. Interestingly, the majority of parents felt that the BSD would make no difference to student health, whereas the majority of teachers did.

The Balanced School Day pilot project is currently at the exploratory stage in the OCDSB. Results from this evaluation tend to support the main assumptions regarding the benefits of the BSD, and are consistent with findings from other school districts in Ontario that have implemented the Balanced School Day schedule. Nevertheless, the fact that schools piloting this schedule offer different programs (i.e., French Immersion vs. English/Core French) must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. In fact, a detailed analysis of the results by school revealed very different response patterns for specific questions. The full report contains this level of detail and is available to staff upon request.