

310 Calendar Implementation Final Report

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Background

The 310 calendar was approved by the board in 2009 for implementation in the 2009-2010 school year. Along with calendar implementation, came a commitment to monitor the implementation process and the impact of the 310 calendar model on student learning in Prairie Valley School Division.

An interim report was prepared in January of 2010 based on the first four months of implementation. Since that time, further data has been gathered from the Student Information Record System (SIRS), from staff allocation and utilization information provided by administrators, from the Ministry of Education Student Data System (SDS) and from the Prairie Valley Payroll system. Information has also been gathered throughout the implementation year from teachers, administrators and athletic directors about various aspects of the implementation. To date, there has been no follow-up information gathered from either students or parents/guardians.

The information gathered includes quantitative data around staff and student attendance, instructional time, professional development, course completion rates and student achievement. It should be noted that the report is based on a single year of implementation and there are cautions around making claims of success or failure based on such limited data. While successes can be celebrated and challenges examined, it would be premature to make long-term decisions or claims about the calendar model based on the data at this point. A report at the end of a three or even a five year implementation will be far more definitive as to the effects of the 310 calendar on student learning in Prairie Valley School Division.

The 310 calendar is based on a set of seven belief statements that underpin not only the physical structure of the calendar but what we believe about student learning in Prairie Valley School Division.

The following belief statements and the commitments associated with them serve as the organizational structure for this report.

- We believe in a school division culture that focuses on maximizing student engagement, student learning and student achievement.
- We believe in maximizing student contact time with regularly assigned staff.
- We believe in valuing learning opportunities for students both inside and outside of the classroom and school.
- We believe in honouring the diversity of individual schools and communities within the unifying framework of a culture of learning.
- We believe in a culture of learning to maximize the quality of teaching and learning.
- We believe that continuous blocks of instructional days are critical to effective teaching and learning.
- We believe in accountability for learning by all stakeholders.



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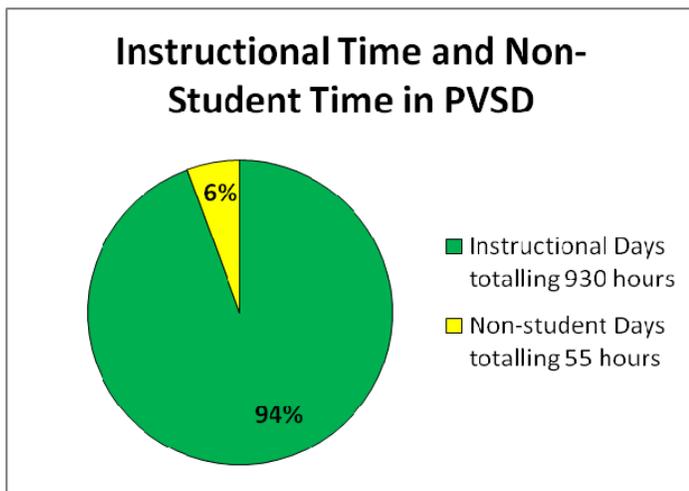
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Belief #1 – We believe in a school division culture that focuses on maximizing student engagement, student learning and student achievement by:

- Supporting and protecting engaged learning time.
- Ensuring that all school activities are tied to curricular objectives/outcomes.
- Maximizing a variety of academic instructional opportunities to engage all students.
- A calendar structure that is educationally sound for all students.
- Modeling and promoting a culture of learning within Prairie Valley School Division.

Supporting and Protecting Engaged Learning Time

The 310 calendar utilizes 180 days of 310 minutes each to provide 930 instructional hours to students. There are only 11 non-student days in the calendar that are used for parent/student/teacher conferences, system-wide professional development and school startup and semester end business.



Each school utilizes a common 6-day cycle to provide consistency in scheduling across the school division and to maximize the potential for schools to work together within the constraints of the calendar. This facilitates the offering of shared programming such as band, magnet programs and distance learning.

Within each 6-day cycle there are 31 instructional hours and all staff are tasked with ensuring that students are engaged in learning during that time. Research by Dr. Brian Noonan from the University of Saskatchewan has shown that, across Saskatchewan, engaged learning time, when students are actively involved in the process of learning, can be only a fraction of the allocated instructional time. Individual teachers are tasked with focusing on what they do to engage students in learning throughout the school day. Part of this focus is ensuring that appropriate time is given to the core instructional areas.

Instructional time in grades 1-9 is measured in minutes per week and each core curriculum area has a Ministry of Education recommended time allocation. In grades 10-12 (secondary level), the courses are measured in hours and a single credit course is designed to be 100 hours in length¹. In Prairie Valley School Division secondary students receive 93 hours of instructional time per credit, up from 89 and 91 hours previously. This compares very favourably to provincial averages which traditionally see students receiving 84-90 hours of instructional time per credit course depending on the local calendar structure.

There has been a conscious effort to support and protect engaged learning time at the school level within the 310 calendar framework. One area that administrators focused on during the implementation year was attention

¹ This is a bit misleading in that, under the current legislation a school year is defined as 985 hours making 98.5 the maximum number of hours available for a 100 hour course, with no allowance for non-student days.

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to the amount of time and the purposes for which students were brought out of their regular classrooms to large group assemblies. Regular weekly or biweekly whole school assemblies, once a common occurrence in many schools, have been virtually eliminated from school timetables. For example, a school that has eliminated a 30 minute weekly assembly from the timetable, has gained 18 hours of instructional time over the course of the school year.

Most schools still have infrequent special assemblies targeted at specific local school initiatives. As was reported in the *310 Calendar Interim Implementation Report*, school-based administrators reported an average of 160 minutes allocated to assemblies over a four-month period. Projecting this sample as a constant across the school year, the average time associated with assemblies has been 400 minutes or less than seven hours.

School Activities are Tied To Curricular Outcomes and Maximizing a Variety of Instructional Opportunities

Administrators reported that school activities such as field trips, guest presenters and special assemblies were closely related to the schools' learning improvement plans, celebrations of cultural events and curriculum-specific enrichment opportunities such as guest presenters.

In reporting on activities outside of the regular classroom linked to curricular objectives/outcomes, administrators identify that 62% of activities were directly connected to core curriculum objectives appropriate to the grade levels involved. These activities occurred in and out of the school building and included author visits, story tellers, attendance at Agribition, science center visits, curling, skiing, attendance at dramatic performances, visits to the court-

house and to museums. Twelve administrators reported activities that align with the provincial priority of smooth transitions following high school. These activities included visits to post-secondary institutions and career-fairs. The third major focus of activities outside of the regular classroom was cultural with many of the activities connected to the cultural base of the local school community or to *A Time for Significant Leadership* initiative.

A Calendar Structure that is Educationally Sound for All Students

The calendar structure was designed to be educationally sound for all students in both 2009-2010 and again for 2010-2011. Students have continuous blocks of uninterrupted instructional time in the form of five and four day weeks. With the exception of the Christmas, Easter and February breaks, students have breaks of only two or three days at a time over weekends.

	2009-2010	2010-2011
Instructional Days	180	180
Number of 5 day weeks	26	26
Number of 4 day weeks	10	10
Number of weeks less than 4 days	4	4
Student days per semester	90	90
Hours per credit course	93	93

The post-Labour Day start is designed to give all students equal footing in starting back to school. In previous years it was observed that a percentage of students began the school year after Labour Day, regardless of the official start date for the school year. In some cases these students missed almost two weeks of school, jeopardizing their chances for academic success. In 2008-2009, the year prior to the imple-



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mentation of the 310 calendar, opening day enrolment as measured on August 27 was 7945 students. By September 30, 2008 that number had risen to 8123, meaning almost 200 students were unable to benefit from the first important formative days of the school year. By comparison, in 2009-2010, the opening day enrolment as measured on September 8 was 8039, a number that rose to 8043 by September 30, 2009.

ing targeted professional development for all division staff. System-wide institute days have been expanded to include all professional and support staff. Opportunities are being provided for caretakers, bus drivers, administrative support staff, educational assistants, professional support staff, teacher and administrators. These opportunities are aligned with the division's strategic plan and our operational priorities.

Modeling and Promoting a Culture of Learning

A culture of learning is being promoted throughout the school division by implement-

Belief #2 – We believe in maximizing student contact time with regularly assigned staff by:

- Improving and monitoring student attendance
- Focusing awareness of interruptions to instructional time and time utilization

As a result of calendar implementation, the monitoring of student attendance was a focus for both schools and central office during the course of the 2009-2010 school year.

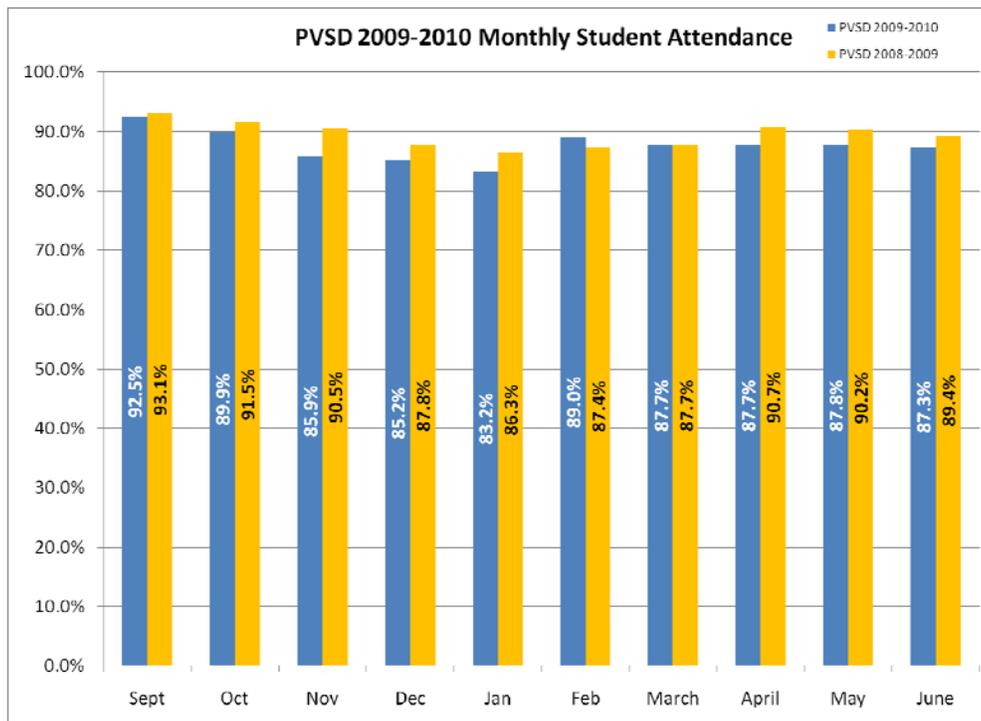
Improving and Monitoring Student Attendance

At first glance it would appear that student attendance has declined over the previous year.

There are many factors influencing the attendance statistics for the 2009-2010 school year including:

- Increased attention to consistent recordkeeping around student absences.
- H1N1 in October and November of 2009².
- Weather-related absenteeism in January and February of 2010.
- Continuation of previous attendance patterns in a new calendar model.

Almost 18% of student absences during the 2009-2010



² The data for student absence due to illness is presented here. This includes all absence for illness, not just H1N1 related absences. There was a spike in absence due to illness during early November 2009 when H1N1 peaked.

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school year were recorded as being due to illness. Illness was the single highest reason for student absence from school. In addition to illness, medical appointments accounted for 2.9% of student absences during the school year.

Weather-related absences are always a concern given the geography and weather patterns of our school division. Weather-related absences occur when buses do not run or when weather and road conditions make travel to schools impractical. It should be noted that non-bus students who stay away from school when buses don't run are not recorded as absent due to weather. They are recorded as absent—parent excused if the parent or guardian calls to excuse the student from school because buses are not running.

During the 2009-2010 school year, 4178 registered student days were lost to weather-related absence. This number is small when compared to the total number of registered student days in the school year which was 1 447 334. The overall impact of weather on student attendance was 0.66 of 1%. In terms of overall absenteeism, 7.7% of the absences recorded in 2009-2010 were attributed to weather and bus-related reasons.

During the public consultation process prior to the approval of the 310 calendar, the stakeholders were asked for their input with respect to the week-long February break that

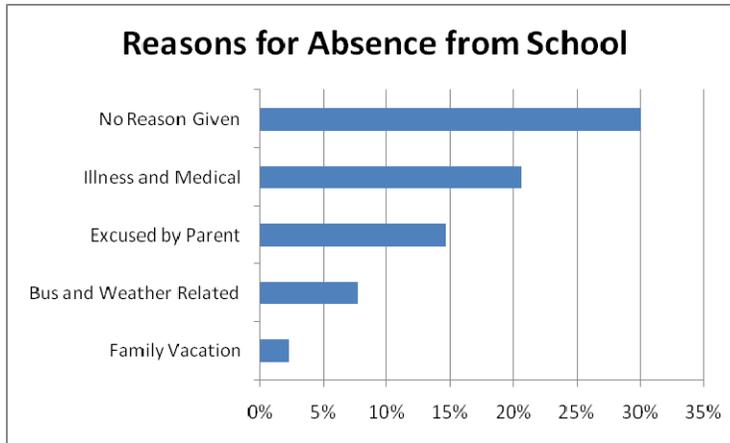
has traditionally been a part of the Prairie Valley School Division calendar. 75% of those who responded indicated a preference for a week-long break in February during the week including Family Day as opposed to having several four-day weeks distributed throughout the school year. Attendance records from 2009-2010 show that 2.3% of absences re-

ported were for family vacations that occurred outside of the scheduled school breaks.

Under the 310 calendar model, Fridays are regular instructional days in most weeks. Friday attendance was monitored and results collected over a set of five Fri-

days. The Friday attendance rates were compared to the overall attendance rates for the month to determine whether or not there were issues with students taking Fridays off. The idea of previous attendance patterns continuing into a new calendar model was raised as a concern during the consultation process. Elementary school attendance rates were not significantly different from overall attendance rates for the month. High school attendance was consistently three percent lower on Fridays than for the month as a whole for the months sampled. Having no baseline data for comparison, it is difficult to say whether this is due to a change in the calendar model or is consistent with attendance in past years.

Without baseline data from previous years to provide a comparison, it is difficult to say whether the two-week break at Christmas and the week-long February break for stu-



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dents had a positive impact on the number of students absent for family winter vacations. The data from 2009-2010 will provide the baseline data for monitoring this type of absence in future years.

The area that is currently of greatest concern in terms of student attendance are the unexcused and parent excused absences that enable students to develop poor attendance patterns by not making daily attendance at school a high priority in their lives. In 2009-2010 almost 15% of student absences were recorded as “parent excused” while just over 30% of absences had no reason attached at all.

Across the school division, schools have made student attendance a key area of focus in keeping with the commitment to improving and monitoring student attendance. 14 schools (37%) included an attendance goal as a part of their Learning Improvement Plan last year and this year 13 schools (34%) have indicated that improved student attendance will be a goal area.

Instructional Time and Time Utilization

Time utilization within individual classrooms has been tracked to ensure provincial mandates with respect to core curriculum areas are being met. The unaudited results of time utilization as

submitted by grade 1-9 classroom teachers shows that collectively, Prairie Valley students are receiving a well-balanced timetable of core curriculum opportunities augmented with locally developed opportunities. On average, students in grades 1-9 devote 98 minutes per cycle to local options available in each school to accommodate the diversity of needs unique to each community. 98 minutes equates to about 5% of instructional time, which is well within Ministry guidelines for locally developed options.

The structure of the curriculum in grades 1-5 allows teachers, in consultation with their administrator, to reduce time in any given core curriculum area by up to 20% to allow for locally developed programming. In Prairie Valley schools, this provision is used to find time within the school day to provide second language instruction, computer application instruction and other school-specific options for students. At the middle level, from grades 6-9, 10% of the instructional time is reserved for locally developed programming. If there is an identified need within the school, one or two core areas may be reduced within that 20% guideline to provide further support within the area of need—for example, a school with intense needs in English Language Arts might reduce the time allocation in Math, Science and Social Studies by

Provincial Guidelines for Instructional Time—1860 minute week (6-day Cycle)

Area	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
ELA	694	694	694	694	694	632	372	372	372
Math	260	260	260	260	260	260	248	248	248
Science	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186
Social Studies	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186
Arts Ed	248	248	248	248	248	248	248	248	248
Health	100	100	100	100	100	100	124	124	124
PE	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186	186
Career						62	62	62	62
PAA							62	62	62
Other							186	186	186
Total	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860	1860

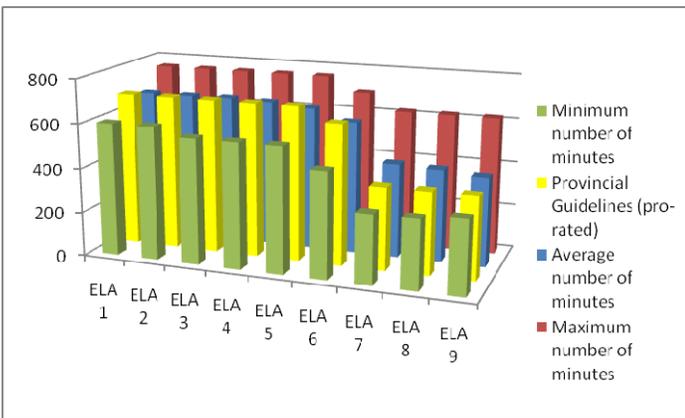
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5% each to garner some additional time for reading instruction.

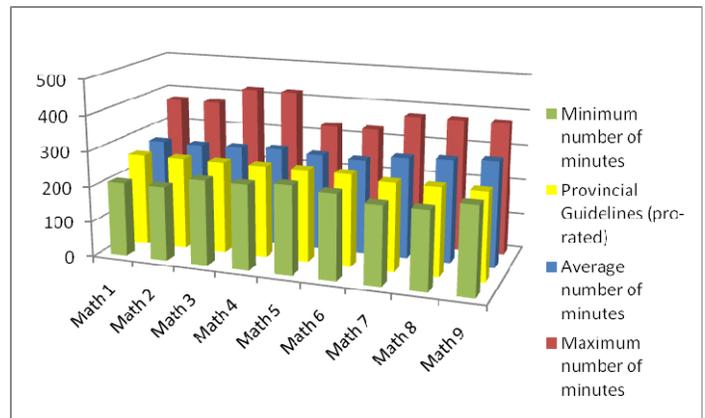
The graphs presented here show the range of instructional time used within Prairie Valley School Division for some of the core curriculum areas. In terms of Mathematics, English Language Arts and Science we are quite good at meeting and often exceeding provincial requirements. Other areas such as Health and Arts Education are often hit the hardest in an attempt to meet the local programming needs within our schools. As well, we see some schools devoting more time to local programming that would be recommended provincially. In grades 1-6 English Language Arts (ELA), the

the grade 7-9 level the Ministry of Education mandates 372 minutes of ELA instruction. The average allocation for ELA instruction at the grade 7-9 level in Prairie Valley School Division is 415 minutes, approximately 11% more time than is required by the Ministry. Individual time allocations for ELA in grades 7-9 range from a low of 400 minutes per cycle to a high of 600 minutes per cycle. All of the differences from the provincial time allocations in English Language Arts fall within the Ministry parameters of 20% difference from the guidelines.



average time allocated to instruction is very close to the time mandated by the Ministry of education. The grade 1-6 average allocation is 651 minutes with actual allocations ranging from a minimum of 600 minutes (14% below the Ministry mandate) to a maximum of 760 minutes (almost 10% higher than the Ministry mandate).

In grades 7-9, the average time allocated to English Language Arts instruction slightly exceeds the provincial mandate. The provincially mandated time is 694 minutes of ELA instruction per 6-day cycle under the 310 calendar. At



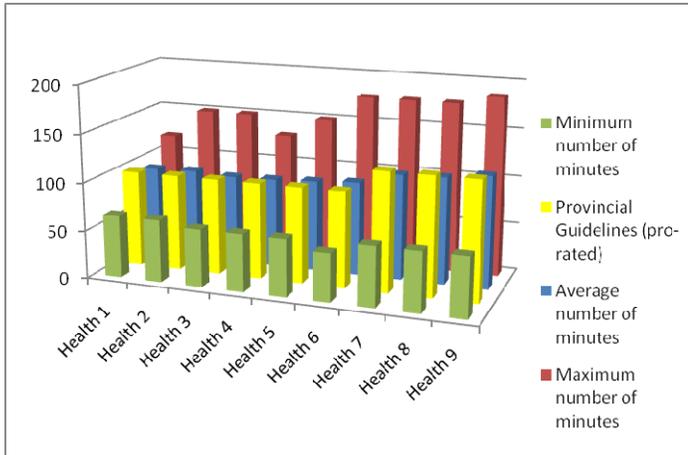
Time allocated to Mathematics instruction in grades 1-9 across the division is consistently higher than the time required by the Ministry for Mathematics instruction. Students are expected to have 260 minutes of mathematics instruction during a 6-day cycle up to the end of grade 6 and then it drops to 248 minutes a cycle to the end of grade 9. On average, Prairie Valley students in grades 1-9 receive 280 minutes of math instruction in each 6 day cycle. The individual school time allocations range from a low of 240 minutes per cycle (almost at the Ministry mandate) to a high of 372 minutes per cycle (50% more time than is required by the Ministry).

Students are expected to receive 100 minutes of Health instruction per cycle in grades 1-6



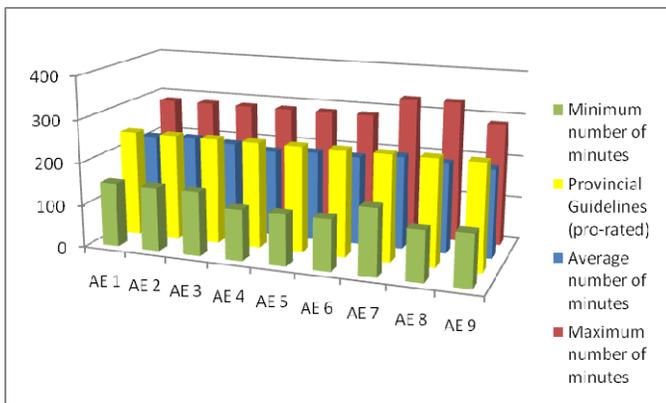
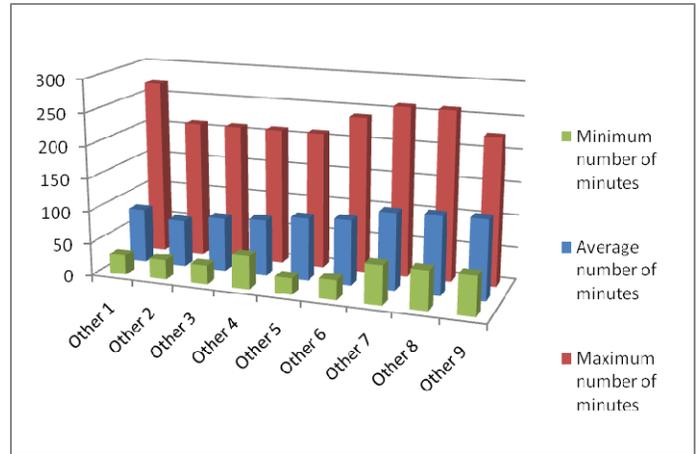
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rising to 124 minutes per cycle in grades 7-9. On average, Prairie Valley Grade 1-6 and 7-9 students receive 95 and 117 minutes of Health instruction per cycle respectively. The individual school allocations of time range from a low of 60 minutes per cycle (40% less than required) and a high of 177 minutes per cycle (77% more than required).

cycle in grades 1-9. The average Arts Education time allocation in Prairie Valley schools is 15% lower than the Ministry-recommended value at 212 minutes per cycle with the range of time allocations stretching from a low of 130 minutes per cycle to a high of 285 minutes per cycle.



Arts Education, which includes Music and Band, Drama, Dance, and Visual Arts, is allocated 248 minutes of instructional time per

The time allocated to locally developed options is varied across the school division and across grade levels. Some schools do not use any optional programming in grades 1-6 while other have as much as 220 minutes, still within the 20% of total instructional time available to be devoted to local options. In some schools, the time borrowed from core curricular areas such as Health and Arts Education is used to augment other core curricular areas such as Mathematics and English Language Arts. In other schools the time reallocated is devoted to specific options such as French language instruction or Computer Skills.

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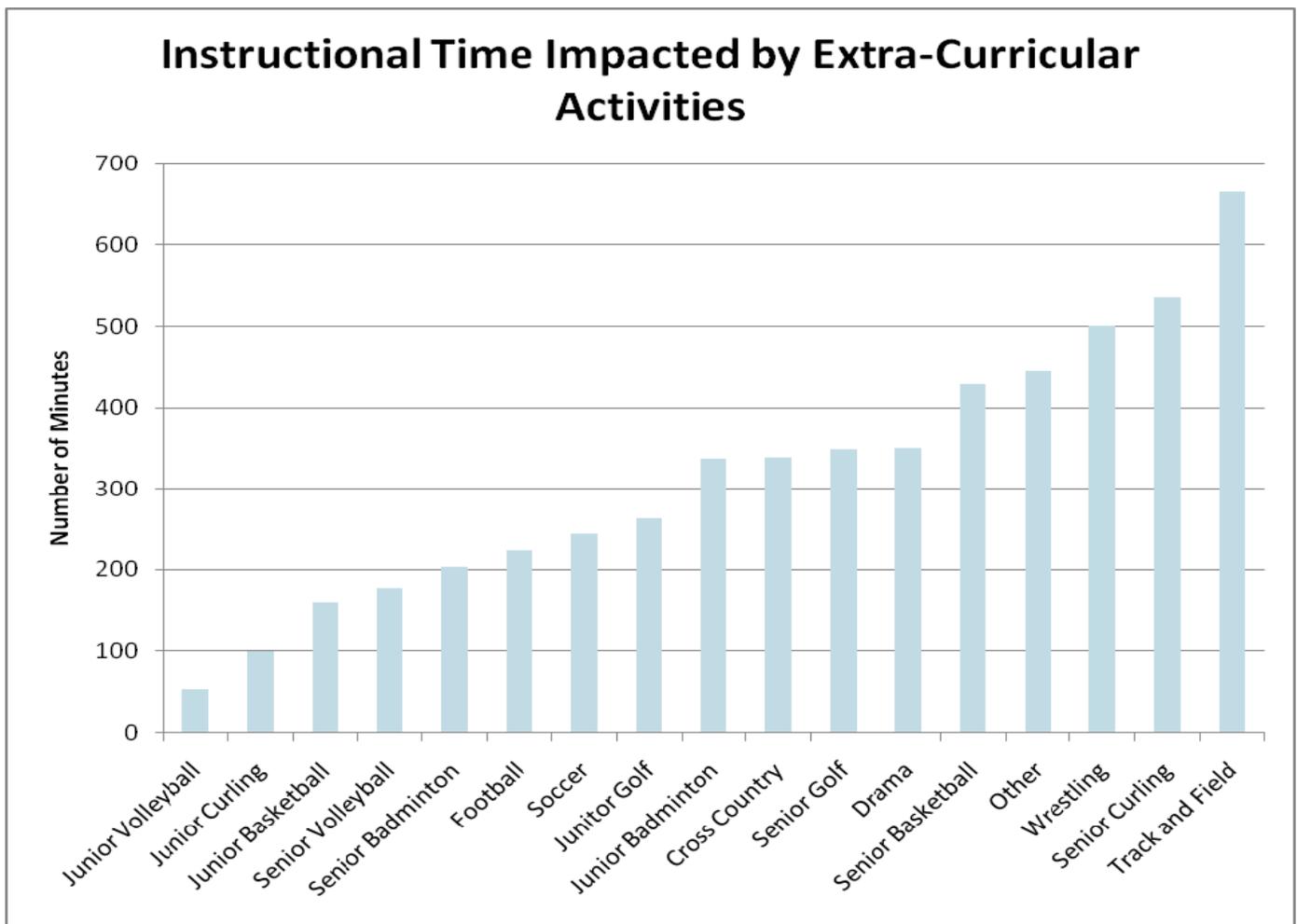
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Belief #3 – We believe in valuing learning opportunities for students both inside and outside of the classroom and school by:

- Providing extra-curricular learning opportunities that do not jeopardize engaged student learning time
- Providing 50 minute at noon and opportunities for organized noon-hour programming
- Providing activities linked to learning objectives/outcomes accessible to all students

Extra-curricular Opportunities and Engaged Learning Time

Extra-curricular involvement is identified by many researchers as being a key component in student learning. Students who are involved in school activities such as sports and clubs are more engaged in school itself. In studies of the effects of extra-curricular involvement on student achievement, students who maintain balance between involvement in activities and time for school work tend to achieve at higher levels than students who are not involved in school activities.



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Reporting on extra-curricular learning opportunities for students, administrators and athletic directors identified the number of minutes of instructional time students missed for each of the activities. In some cases, the numbers are high because the activities occur during full school days. Golf, Cross Country Running, Track & Field and the Provincial Student Leadership Conference are all full-day events which Prairie Valley School Division has no role in scheduling. Similarly, football is scheduled outside of the school division and for most schools involves significant travel time.

Because of the considerable distances between schools in rural Saskatchewan, Prairie Valley students, like their peers in other Saskatchewan school divisions, end up missing some instructional time to facilitate their participation in interschool sports and events. In keeping with our commitment not to jeopardize engaged learning time with extra-curricular involvement, we have tracked the time away from classes used by the various sports and clubs over the course of the school year. Even the most time-intensive activities such as track and field take students away from their classes a total of two days or less during the school year. Administrators have consciously monitored the loss of instructional time lost to extra-curricular travel at the school level. Although we do not have baseline data from previous years, several administrators report that their perception is that time away from class has been reduced.

50 Minute Noon Break and Noon Activities

The noon break in each school in Prairie Valley School Division is determined by the local

school administration in consultation with the Operational Superintendents. The noon breaks range from 50 to 65 minutes in length and are impacted by several factors. These include the offering of noon courses, activities such as intra-mural sports, magnet school connections and coordination of transportation between associated schools. Each school determines the opportunities that students have during noon breaks while ensuring there is sufficient time for nutrition and exercise between the morning and afternoon classes. Some of the opportunities available to students include participation in intra-mural sports and games, supervised outdoor recreation time, noon-hour courses, and various clubs and activities based on student interests.

As well as the noon break of at least 50 minutes, the *Education Act*, 1995 requires schools to provide 30 minutes of break time within the school day. In elementary grades this is generally done through a recess of anywhere from 12-15 minutes in length while in the higher grades, 4-6 minute breaks between classes meet this requirement. Break time allocations across the school division range from 10 to 35 minutes with the most common being 30 minutes of break time in two 15-minute intervals in elementary grades and five 5-minute breaks in high school grades.

Providing Activities Linked to Learning Outcomes and Accessible to All Students

As a part of the effort to provide activities linked to learning objectives and outcomes that are accessible to all students, many of the fees and ways in which programs and special events are offered have been explored during the 2009-

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2010 school year. As we move into the second year of calendar implementation, we see more students able to access enrichment opportunities as well as students able to access a wider range of secondary program offerings regardless of the limitations of any individual school facility. Further work in these areas over the coming months will ensure that this particular commitment is met, something that would not be possible if schools did not share a common calendar structure such as the 310 calendar. As was discussed on page 6 in the *Interim Re-*

port on 310 Calendar Implementation, administrators identified activities accessible to all students that occurred in and out of the school building. These included author visits, story tellers, attendance at agribition, science center visits, curling, skiing, attendance at dramatic performances, visits to the courthouse and to museums. The removal of school fees associated with all core curricular trips has made access to these opportunities more equitable across PVSD than they may have been in the past.

Belief #4 – We believe in honouring the diversity of individual schools and communities within the unifying framework of a culture of learning with:

- An equitable calendar for all schools and communities
- Calendar flexibility at a local level to meet individual school needs
- Accountability by all levels of staff for calendar structure implementation

Equitable Calendar for All Schools and Communities

An equitable calendar for all schools and communities means a calendar that takes into consideration the fact that Prairie Valley School Division encompasses a wide area that has considerable diversity in terms of geography, economic activity, cultural practices and lifestyles. While some parts of the school division may be affected by agricultural timelines, other areas are more closely tied to seasonal recreational timelines. Similarly, there are portions of the school division that are impacted by Regina

school system timelines while others are more closely tied to the workings of our neighbouring school divisions. Taking all of these often-conflicting needs into account, our goal has been to design a single calendar that gives each school consideration without privileging one school or community over another.

Some of the factors that were considered in the placement of non-student days in the calendar are:

- Placing the first system institute day in the week before students start back to school and the convention day in March to provide a week-long winter break to both staff and students.
- Providing system professional development days early in the year to minimize interruptions to learning flow.
- Placing the fall parent/student/teacher conference day at the end of Agribition week to accommodate those families who participate in that event.
- Using both Mondays and Fridays for non-student days in recognition of the many extra-curricular events that students and their teacher advisors access during school year.



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- Providing four-day weeks at intervals throughout the year to allow families to plan personal business without having to take students out of school.

Calendar Flexibility to Meet Local Needs

While the calendar is designed to be equitable in meeting the needs of all stakeholders, we are also aware that each community has its own needs with respect to the school calendar. For example, parent/student/teacher conferences, held in November and April, are loosely regulated by the calendar structure with flexibility to allow each community to make its own schedule. Some schools use the designated day for conferences while others use a combination of part of that day and an evening or two evenings only. If evenings are utilized, the staff and students take the time in lieu of those evenings on the designated conference day in the calendar. This allows associated schools to schedule conferences such that parents with children in schools in two communities are able to attend conferences at both locations. It also accommodates the work-life needs of parents and guardians.

Accountability By All Levels of Staff for Calendar Structure Implementation

The calendar has been structured to adhere to our beliefs and commitments and staff at all levels are held accountable to ensuring that those beliefs and commitments are upheld. School-based staff provide the first evidence of this accountability in terms of engaged learning time, attention to interruptions, and ensuring that activities are connected to learning objectives and outcomes.

Centrally, a concerted effort is made to honour the beliefs and commitments in terms of minimizing the time staff are asked to be away from their assigned duties for meetings and professional development. Scheduling for extra-curricular events and sports league play is done with a view to minimizing the time teachers and students lose to travel and competition. By moving to a model of system institutes rather than single-group professional development, the value of non-student days is maximized as all staff can participate in role-specific sessions without taking them away from student needs.

Belief #5 – We believe in a culture of learning to maximize the quality of teaching and learning by:

- Providing access to relevant, quality professional development opportunities
- Providing up to 5% of contract time for professional development

Access to Relevant, Quality Professional Development Opportunities

A part of providing access to relevant, quality professional development opportunities is to have a strong understanding of the system needs at all levels and how those align with the school division's strategic plan. As a part of this effort, professional development is overseen by the Human Resources team and extends to all roles within the school division.

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By utilizing system institute days in 2009-2010 and again in 2010-2011 the following are some of the opportunities we have been able to provide to staff without interruption to the learning day:

- Student Services Teachers—Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports, Tier 2, tied to the PBIS initiative .
- School-based Administrative Assistants—accounting practices, school generated funds and records management workshops
- Caretakers—Standards and service delivery, Occupational Health and Safety and Facilities workshops
- Teachers and Administrators—curriculum and management workshops in a variety of areas linked to division initiatives
- Bus Drivers—Safety and GPS system workshops
- Educational Assistants—Collaborative problem solving and consensus building workshops around roles and responsibilities
- Community School Staff—long range visioning and the community school philosophy session

As well, professional development opportunities in the areas of non-violent crisis intervention, Project CRISS training and the use of many new teaching and learning technologies have been provided through the system institute format, making them available to a wide audience of Prairie Valley staff.

We develop a culture of learning by providing professional development opportunities, targeted to school based administrators and school teacher leaders, that align with Prairie Valley School Division initiatives. In 2009-2010 approximately two thirds of our administrators attended professional development conferences supported by the division in addition to personal or decentralized professional development opportunities. Administrators attended two conferences last year: the SELU conference, *Getting Serious about School Reform* which featured Robert Marzano, one of the leading educational researchers and the National Canadian Association of Principals Annual Conference.

This support is continuing in 2010-2011 where approximately one third of school-based administrators and seventeen teacher leaders attended the SELU conference, *Leading through Diversity and Change* featuring the world's leading voice on educational change, Michael Fullan, and a leading researcher in the Pyramid Response to Intervention initiative, Mike Mattos. Continued support for divisional leaders will embed a culture of learning within the division and should assist in our goal of improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Providing Up to 5% of Contract Time for Teacher Professional Development

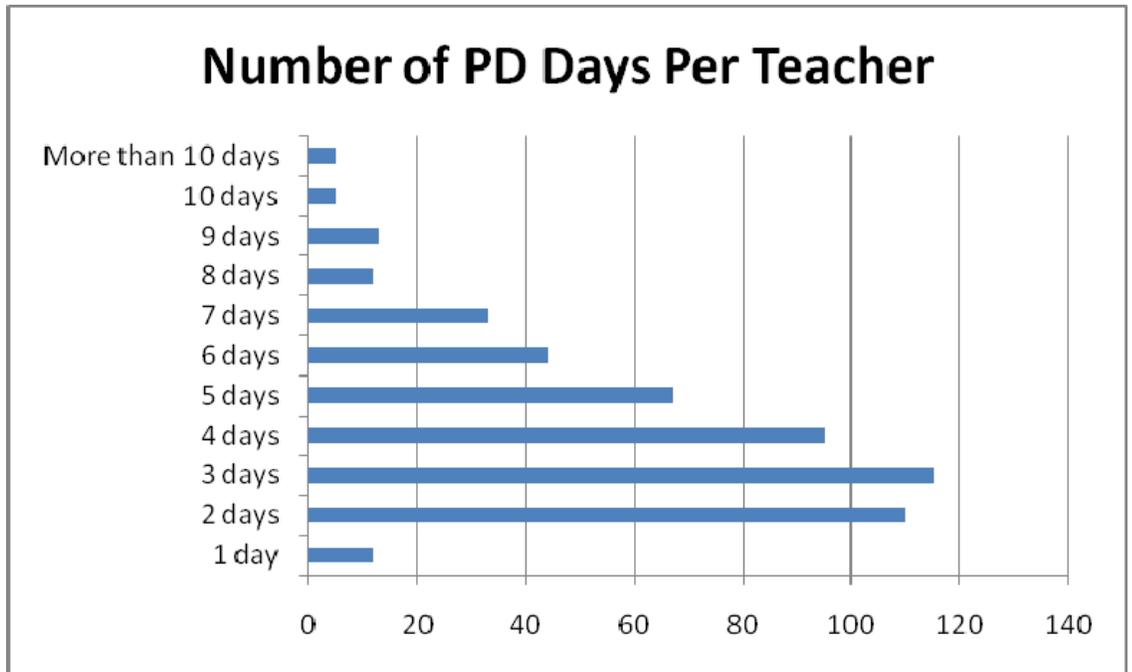
During 2009-2010, Prairie Valley School Division has tracked the professional development of teachers to ensure that our commitment to teacher professional development does not exceed our 5% mandate (9 teaching days), thus maximizing student-teacher contact time. In order to provide for relevant, timely profes-



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sional development activities, alternate forms of professional development such as webinars or Adobe Connect meetings are being utilized. Administrators have also been monitoring events that take teachers away from students and there is a heightened awareness of the importance of teacher time with students throughout the division as evidenced by conversations with administrators.



Belief #6 – We believe that continuous blocks of instructional days are critical to effective teaching and learning to be provided by:

- Protecting the continuity of instruction for all students
- Limiting any set of consecutive non-instructional days to groups of no more than three wherever possible

Protecting the Continuity of Instruction

While the occasional break is not detrimental to student learning, students who experience significant interruptions to the continuity of their instruction suffer in terms of their development as learners and this is reflected in achievement

levels. To achieve continuity of instruction a number of efforts are in place in Prairie Valley School Division

- A six-day cycle system that ensures ongoing instruction in core areas for grades 1-9 across ten months.
- Conscious efforts on the part of division-based staff to virtually eliminate meetings and sessions that pull teachers away from students in September, January and June.
- Close attention to the number of times specific individuals are pulled away from direct contact with students to division-initiated events.
- Eliminating non-student days from the months of September, January and June

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once the instructional year or semester has begun.

While it is impossible to completely eliminate interruptions to continuous instruction, the commitment remains at the forefront of our planning efforts. Those planning events are expected to actively weigh the pros and cons of each instance that a staff member is pulled away from student contact for division-initiated business.

Limiting Consecutive Non-Student Days to Groups of No More Than Three

In developing the physical calendar for 2009-2010 and again for 2010-2011, careful attention was paid to the number of consecutive non-instructional days experienced by students during the course of the school year. In previous years students in some schools had several four-day “weekends” during the year because of the intentional placement of non-student days in proximity to statutory holidays. That has been reduced to none in 2009-2010 and only one in 2010-2011.

Belief #7 – We believe in accountability for learning by all stakeholders

In proposing the 310 Calendar model in January of 2009, the committee acknowledged the responsibility of all stakeholder groups for student learning:

Accountability for student learning does not fall to only one or two stakeholders. It is the entire group of stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, central office personnel and Board members—who each have a role in being accountable for student learning and ultimately student achievement. Through a process of educating stakeholders and monitoring activity and results we can facilitate each stakeholder taking a genuine interest in the success of students in Prairie Valley School Division.

The process of educating stakeholders is ongoing and includes several initiatives across the school division. Individual schools have worked with parents and community members to raise awareness around the importance of regular student attendance. School Community Councils have worked to share information with parents and the broader community about the importance of student learning and the need for broad-based community support of student learning. Central office personnel and board members interacted with community members, parents, staff members and students at several regionalized events in the spring of 2009 to hear thoughts and concerns around what constitutes student success and how we can support all students in Prairie Valley schools in their efforts to achieve that success.

During the 2009-2010 school year student achievement increased modestly in both reading and writing. Reading at the Grade 1 level

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increased from 84% of students achieving or exceeding target levels to 86% of students achieving or exceeding target levels. Similarly, at the grade 3 level, achievement increased from 71% of students achieving or exceeding target levels to 82% of students achieving or exceeding target levels. At grade 6 reading results increased from 83% of students achieving or exceeding target levels to 85% of students achieving or exceeding target levels.

Writing results at grade 6 and grade 9 also reflected improvement during the 2009-2010 school year over the previous year's results. The percentage of grade 6 students achieving or exceeding target levels rose from 64% to 70%. The percentage of grade 9 students achieving or exceeding target levels rose from 64% to 79%.

At the secondary level, average marks in English Language Arts courses, Mathematics courses and Science courses rose 3% across all levels. The overall average mark for ELA courses rose from 70% in 2008-2009 to 73% in 2009-2010. The overall average mark for Mathematics courses rose from 71% in 2008-2009 to 74% in 2009-2010, and the overall mark for Science courses rose from 73% in 2008-2009 to 76% in 2009-2010.

At the same time, the average number of credits earned per student rose in secondary English Language Arts and Science courses and remained steady in Mathematics courses.

As we move into the second year of 310 calendar implementation it would be premature to

look at student achievement results and try to connect them to the calendar alone. Certainly attention to basic issues like student attendance and teacher presence can be pointed to as factors in the academic gains seen in reading, in Treaty Essential Learning results, in the Assessment for Learning in Writing and in secondary student success. Educational researchers Dr. Douglas Reeves and Dr. Robert Marzano indicate that changes in student achievement patterns are generally not verifiable in any less than a five-year period and Dr. Reeves supports using trends over seven or more years to make decisions around whether or not an initiative has produced positive results. Both of these individuals as well as many of their colleagues caution against looking at year-by-year fluctuations in results as there are so many factors that influence the complex area of measuring student achievement. Achievement results published in the Prairie Valley School Division Annual Report on Student Assessment show growth in many areas over the past four years and future reports will provide the solid evidence needed with respect to the success of the calendar model.

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Findings and Recommendations

With a full year of implementation complete and the second year following the 310 calendar model now underway, the tracking of data around the implementation process has produced a number of findings. Many of the findings confirm expected outcomes that were flagged at the beginning of the calendar implementation process. Others are reflective of known issues with the sustainability of calendar structures in the past. For that reason, several recommendations are provided in this report to meet the identified challenges head-on and to provide for a strong, sustainable calendar framework that facilitates the benefits to student learning that it was designed to support.

Findings:

1. Instructional time has been increased both through the additional hours of instruction provided as well as through increased attention to the frequency and purpose of interruptions to instructional time.
2. Activities that are available to all students and that take students away from traditional classroom-based instruction are closely tied to curricular outcomes and objectives.
3. Student attendance tracking has shown that student attendance is an issue in a number of schools across the school division.
4. Time allocated to individual core curriculum areas across the school division is in keeping with Ministry of Education mandates in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts. It is less well-aligned when it comes to locally determined options, Arts Education, Career Education, and Practical and Applied Arts.
5. Schools are keeping track of noon breaks and ensuring that the minimum 50 minutes of time has been allocated to noon breaks. Recess breaks are less stringently adhered to in some schools.
6. Extra-curricular involvement in any given activity takes students away from instructional time for just over one day's worth of total time.
7. Virtually all teachers in Prairie Valley School Division have accessed professional development of some type that has taken them away from their students. The average time away from students is approximately 3.5 days per teacher, well within the 5% (9 day) maximum.
8. Attention has been paid centrally to not taking staff out of schools during key parts of the year, with the pattern continuing during September of 2010.
9. Student results have been positive for the 2009-2010 school year although it is too early to attribute gains specifically to the calendar structure.

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Recommendations

1. Continue to monitor time utilization including interruptions to instructional time. Maintain staff awareness of the importance of engaged learning time and focus attention on the nature of activities that take students and teachers away from instructional time.
2. Continue to monitor and enforce the need for a strong relationship between activities and curricular outcomes. Pay particular attention to special event times such as Christmas, year-end, graduation and Education Week.
3. Keep the Belief and Commitment statements in a place of prominence in all school planning. Administrators must be vigilant in upholding and actualizing the Beliefs and Commitments in their schools. Calendar designers must also adhere to the statements in designing future calendars.
4. Regular student attendance is critical to student achievement. Monitoring and following up on student absences needs to remain a focus in all schools. Parents, students, community members and other stakeholders need to support students in regular school attendance.
5. The time allocations for core curriculum should be monitored and corrected where necessary.
6. Timetables and bell times should be monitored annually to prevent erosion of provisions such as 50 minute noon breaks, adequate recess breaks and ensuring the length of the school day remains at 310 minutes.
7. Professional development opportunities for all staff should be planned so as to provide a balanced program of professional learning that aligns with division initiatives. Professional development opportunities that take teachers away from students should be monitored so as not to exceed the 5% mandated within the calendar structure.
8. Student achievement data should be tracked over a period of three to five years to determine the impact of calendar structure on student learning.
9. An extension of the alternate calendar year for 2011-2014 should be requested from the Ministry. Upon approval of the extension, a comprehensive monitoring plan for the three-year period from September 2010-June 2013 should be designed. A final report on the alternative calendar, based on the data collected, should be produced and presented to the Board in October of 2013.