

Time to Learn Discussion Paper

Instructional Time: Grades 7–9

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Further to the recommendations included in *Time to Learn Strategy: Instructional Time and Semestering* (February 2002), this paper has been developed for the consideration of boards, schools, and other education partners in the discussion of instructional time as an important factor in the quality of student learning and achievement. It is intended to inform discussion regarding the allotment of instructional time in grades 7–9.

BACKGROUND

Until 1996, *Public School Programs* included time allotments, expressed as percentages, for junior high courses.

Percentages of Instructional Time as recommended by *Public School Programs* prior to 1996:

Course	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Minutes per day
English Language Arts	18%–24%	18%–24%	15%–21%	51–69 min./day
French	12%	12%	12%	36 min./day
Health PDR (Combined)	3%–6% 6% (9%–12%)	3%–6% 6% (9%–12%)	3%–6% 6% (9%–12%)	9–18 min./day 18 min./day (27–36 min./day)
Mathematics	15%–21%	15%–21%	9%–12%	39–54 min./day
Physical Education	6%–9%	6%–9%	6%–9%	18–27 min./day
Social Studies	15%	15%	15%	45 min./day
Science	9%–12%	9%–12%	9%–12%	27–36 min./day
Elective	6%–12%	6%–12%	6%–12%	18–36 min./day

The current *Public School Programs* provides the following guidelines for time allotments:

It is the school's responsibility to design schedules appropriate for all students. Principals are responsible for monitoring schedules to ensure an appropriate and productive balance of instructional time among the subject areas.

School schedules and time allotments for each course should allow for

- ▶ a focus on student learning and achievement of expected learning outcomes
- ▶ the learning needs of individual students
- ▶ opportunities for meaningful integration of curricula
- ▶ the particular needs of the school community

With its focus on the intended results of learning and the opportunity for all students to achieve expected outcomes, the learning outcomes framework for curriculum allows principals and teachers flexibility in allotting time for the effective delivery of the junior high program. In designing class timetables and teachers' schedules, principals and teachers might consider ways to

- ▶ ensure that the program provides opportunities for all students to achieve curriculum outcomes specific to each subject area
- ▶ facilitate integrated, interdisciplinary program organization based on the natural affinities among subject areas and the connections among the expected learning outcomes of junior high courses
- ▶ provide class periods of unequal time in a flexibly scheduled day, allowing students extended blocks of time to pursue learning opportunities and expand learning experiences
- ▶ provide additional time in courses when it is needed to enable students to achieve expected outcomes
- ▶ facilitate collaborative planning and co-ordination of instruction to meet students' needs and make optimal use of teacher expertise

TIME TO LEARN

Time to Learn Strategy: Instructional Time and Semestering (February 2002) emphasizes the importance of providing teachers and students with blocks of uninterrupted instructional time long enough (but not too long) to engage students in active and interactive learning. Students need "time to learn." Teachers need "time to teach." 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 *Time to Learn Strategy* paper includes the recommendation 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

Mathematics

It is recommended that schools set the goal of 60 minutes daily for mathematics. This represents 20% of instructional time. This math hour will include 5 minutes every day of mental math. The teaching resource, *Mental Math in Junior High (Grades 7–9)*, has been purchased to assist teachers of mathematics in planning the effective use of this daily mental math time.

English Language Arts/French Immersion Language Arts

It is recommended that schools set the goal of 60 minutes daily (300 minutes per week) for English language arts/French immersion language arts. This represents 20% of instructional time. It is expected that at least 33% of time allotted for language arts be committed to reading

instruction, reading, and related activities. [See *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum: Grades 7–9* (1997), pp. 131–142.]

With reference to the allotment of instructional time for English language arts in extended core French programs, *Program Policy for French Second Language Programs* (1998) notes that the total amount of time allotted for the extended core French (French and social studies) should be equal to the total amount of time allotted for English language arts and social studies in the English program. [See *Program Policy for French Second Language Programs* (1998), p. 8.]

The allotment of instructional time for English language arts in grades 7–9 French immersion programs should equate to the time allotment for core French in the English program.

Physical Education

It is recommended that schools set the goal of a minimum of 30 minutes daily, or its equivalent, for physical education. *Physical Education Curriculum: Grades 7–9* (1999) recommends that “school boards, together with the school administration and teachers, make every effort to provide daily physical education to students to achieve health benefits.” It is suggested that sport experience, active living, and outdoor activities take up approximately 75 percent of the time allocated for physical education , and that dance and educational gymnastics take up the remaining 25 percent of the time. The time allotment for each movement category of the curriculum should be based upon available resources and facilities. [See *Physical Education Curriculum: Grades 7–9* (1999), p. 41.]

Physical Education Curriculum: Grades 7–9 recognizes the value of co-curricular intramural, interscholastic, and other physical activity programs. It is recommended that schools, in collaboration with partners in their school communities, explore opportunities for students to make optimal use of available time before, during, and after the school day to engage in physical activity.

Other Considerations

Notwithstanding the value of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities [*Current and Emerging Research on Successful Junior High Schools: The Middle Years* (1997), p. 16] and enrichment activities such as exploratories [*Challenge for Excellence: Enrichment and Gifted Education Resource Guide* (1999), p. 9], it is important that boards and their schools address the issue of instructional time lost because of activities that are not related to the curriculum. It is recommended that, to the extent possible, time scheduled for mathematics, language arts, and physical education not be pre-empted by school activities unrelated to those subject areas.

The value of interdisciplinary and integrated curricular approaches to program delivery has been well documented. In planning interdisciplinary units and integrated instruction, teachers are urged to ensure that sufficient time and opportunity are provided each day for learning experiences focussed on prescribed curriculum outcomes for mathematics and language arts.

ISSUES

A number of issues have been raised regarding instructional time and time allotments:

- ▶ *Curriculum Requirements vs. Available Time:*
 - Some educators have expressed concern regarding the number of outcomes teachers and students are required to address at a given grade level. This is a matter of particular concern in regard to students who require more time to accommodate their learning needs and differences. Nova Scotia Teachers Union 2001 Council Resolutions included a resolution “that the NSTU lobby the Department of Education to reduce the number of curriculum outcomes in the APEF Programs in all subject areas.”
 - To support curriculum implementation, in-service education has focussed on subject area requirements with relatively little focus to date on the connections among curriculum outcomes that reflect natural affinities among subject areas and the connections among the expected learning outcomes of junior high courses.
 - The increased emphasis on accountability for student learning is contributing to teacher and administrator concerns regarding their ability to deliver the instructional program within the time available for instruction and to meet the expectations of parents and the education system.
- ▶ *Curriculum Priorities within a Balanced Program of Studies:*
 - The Department has communicated clearly that literacy and mathematics are curriculum priorities. The Department is recommending that schools review time for learning in mathematics with the goal of 60 minutes instructional time daily. The Department is recommending the same goal for language arts and encouraging schools to optimize opportunities for literacy learning in other subject areas. These are important considerations in examining scheduling options and designing interdisciplinary units and integrated instruction.
 - Government has identified children’s physical health and emotional well-being as priorities and has committed to focussing more resources on building “healthy, active bodies.” (Speech from the Throne, March 2001). Increased attention to the importance of active, healthy living has implications for time allotment to both physical education and health/personal development and relationships. However, the increased emphasis on literacy and mathematics is raising issues about time available for health/personal development and relationships and physical education, as well as the valuing of these programs by schools, students, and parents.
 - *Physical Education Curriculum: Grades 7–9* recommends daily physical education. A daily time allotment of 30 minutes is recommended to ensure that students have opportunity to achieve the designated outcomes and to reap related fitness and health benefits. A review of physical education curriculum implementation conducted in 2001 indicated that many schools provide significantly less time than the recommendation. A related issue is the availability of qualified physical educators in the context of current FTE targets.

- The junior high program reflects the need of all students for a balanced, broad-based, quality education. However, the high profile of literacy and mathematics education, the identification of 60 minutes daily as a goal for language arts and for mathematics, and the identification of these two curricular areas for administration of junior high provincial assessment programs reinforce the perception that other areas of the junior high program are less important or not important.
 - Students require a strong foundation in science and social studies. The effective implementation of the Atlantic Canada science and social studies curricula will be a challenge in the time available.
 - Health/personal development and relationships is the curriculum area that responds to increasing societal demands for schools to attend to a wide range of concerns: nutrition, eating disorders, weight control; mental, emotional, and social health; personal safety and injury prevention; substance use and abuse; prevention of problem gambling; environmental and community health; personal development and relationships; sexuality and reproductive health education, career education....The health/personal development and relationships program requires more time than a decade ago. A related issue is the valuing of health/personal development and relationships by staff, students, and parents. The new Health/Personal Development and Relationships: Grades 7–9 curriculum, scheduled for implementation in 2003–04 will require a minimum of 8 percent of instructional time.
 - Electives (art, family studies, music, technology education) are an important component of a balanced program of studies and offer students significant opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning. While time allotment proposed for electives is necessarily less than that allotted to some compulsory courses, it is critical that the importance of the learning experiences afforded by these subject areas be valued by administrators, teachers, parents, and students. [A related issue is the need for learning outcome frameworks and new curriculum guides to replace *Art: Grades 7–9* (1977), *Family Studies: Grades 7–12* (1993), and *Junior High School Music* (1992). New curriculum guides for technology education, grades 7–9 are currently being developed.]
- *Communication*
- The outcomes framework has focussed attention on the intended results of learning and the expectation that schools will provide equitable opportunities for all students to achieve curriculum outcomes specific to each subject area. Parents require clear and consistent information on the Department's expectations and recommendations regarding time allotments that allow those opportunities.
 - It is important that time be recognized as one of the variables that can be manipulated to meet individual student needs in both instructional and assessment contexts. This is an important consideration in considering accommodations/adaptations that may be necessary in individual instances to support student progress and achievement of expected learning outcomes. It is important that parents be informed of significant accommodations provided to their children in this regard.

- It is recommended that curriculum guides currently being developed or revised include guidelines/recommendations for time allocation per unit, module, etc., to assist teachers in program planning.
- It is recommended that effective use of instructional time be a focus of implementation leadership workshops and related in-service education programs and other professional development activities.

APPENDIX: INSTRUCTIONAL TIME Grades 7–9: SOME OPTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Option A

Course	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Percent
English Language Arts	300 mins/week, 360 mins/6-day cycle (60 mins/day)			20%
Core French	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Health/PDR	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Mathematics	300 mins/week, 360 mins/6-day cycle (60 mins/day)			20%
Physical Education	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Social Studies	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Science	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Elective: Art, Family Studies, Music, or Technology Education	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Total	1500 mins/week, 1800 mins/6-day cycle (300 mins/day)			100%

Option B

Course	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Percent
English Language Arts	300 mins/week, 360 mins/6-day cycle (60 mins/day)			20%
Core French	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Health/PDR	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Mathematics	300 mins/week, 360 mins/6-day cycle (60 mins/day)			20%
Physical Education	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Social Studies	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Science	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Elective: Art, Family Studies, Music, or Technology Education	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Total	1500 mins/week, 1800 mins/6-day cycle (300 mins/day)			100%

Option C

Course	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Percent
English Language Arts	285 mins/week, 342 mins/6-day cycle (57 mins/day)			19%
Core French	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Health/PDR	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Mathematics	285 mins/week, 342 mins/6-day cycle (57 mins/day)			19%
Physical Education	150 mins/week, 180 mins/6-day cycle (30 mins/day)			10%
Social Studies	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Science	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Elective: Art, Family Studies, Music, or Technology Education	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Total	1500 mins/week, 1800 mins/6-day cycle (300 mins/day)			100%

Option D

Course	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Percent
English Language Arts	300 mins/week, 360 mins/6-day cycle (60 mins/day)			20%
Core French	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Health/PDR	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Mathematics	300 mins/week, 360 mins/6-day cycle (60 mins/day)			20%
Physical Education	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Social Studies	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Science	180 mins/week, 216 mins/6-day cycle (36 mins/day)			12%
Elective: Art, Family Studies, Music, or Technology Education	120 mins/week, 144 mins/6-day cycle (24 mins/day)			8%
Total	1500 mins/week, 1800 mins/6-day cycle (300 mins/day)			100%

Note: These options are presented for discussion and do not represent the only options available to schools.

Possible Percentages...

Course								
English Language Arts	16	18	20	17.5	20	20	18.8	20
Core French	12	14	12.5	12.5	11.7	10	10.5	11.3
Health/PDR	10	8	7.5	10	10	10	8.3	8
Mathematics	16	18	17.5	15	16.7	20	18.8	20
Physical Education	10	8	7.5	10	8.3	10	8.3	10
Social Studies	12	14	12.5	12.5	11.7	10	12.5	11.3
Science	14	16	15	15	13.3	10	14.5	11.3
Elective	10	8	7.5	10	8.3	10	8.3	8
Total	100	99.9						