

SPRUCE GROVE COMPOSITE HIGH SCHOOL



FLEXIBILITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT 2011/2012 Year End Report



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Darlene Marcinkevics
Principal, SGCHS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Monds", is written in a cursive style.

Tim Monds
Superintendent Parkland School Division #70

SPRUCE GROVE COMPOSITE HIGH SCHOOL

FLEXIBILITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

2011/2012 Year End Report

Declaration for School: (Check one)

Based on the changes made since the 2009/2010 school year and an examination of the results that have been collected, I recommend that Spruce Grove Composite High School should be permanently exempted from the 25 hour per credit requirement.

Comments on the recommendations for SGCHS:

- The current structure inherent within the 25 hour mandate of the Carnegie Unit is not conducive to learning anytime, anyplace any pace. This new way of thinking promotes an inclusive model for all learners, challenging teachers to re-examine their practice and how it impacts learning.
- More energy can go into what should be happening in the class and less time counting (accounting) for time.
- It is essential that we continue to be innovative, going back means that the last 75 years has been the right way and that is where teachers should look to base their practice on.
- When teachers are innovative, they are attentive to the impact of their practice and take into account all things, not just those that are intended with the innovation. In other words, it promotes improved practice.
- The Carnegie Unit resides within the domain educational administration and is a unit of measurement that functions best as a budgetary and planning tool as opposed to a strategy to develop and improve learner outcomes.
- Its pervasiveness has had a detrimental effect in terms of its influence on how and what students learn.
- The result has been an educational system that requires students to function within a bureaucracy of accountability rather than a system that adapts to the needs and desires of the very individuals it is mandated to serve.
- For a variety of reasons, the influence of schools as the center for student social lives is waning in influence.
- Increasingly through social media specifically and technology in general, not only are these social relationships changing, the nature of occupations and how people work has also changed tremendously. The rigid schedules and expectations that are the foundations of the Carnegie Unit are not in sync with the real world today.
- As a result there is an increasingly unnecessary tension within education to provide the requisite skills and abilities of twenty-first learners within the confines of a nineteenth century model.

- The removal of the 25 hour per credit requirement provides the flexibility to make numerous structural changes to the master timetable. Thus allowing the flexibility for student programming, personalized learning, student choice and learning recovery.
- The structural changes created a shift in culture over time which in turn leads to deeper conversations around student learning, teacher practices and assessment.
- School community would not be able to go back to the old traditional stand up and lecture, teacher controlled learning and a cookie cutter model.
- The changes made with program reorganization provide teachers the opportunity to be innovative with instructional practices and to embrace change while taking risks. It was best said at one of our early meetings, *“let learning be the constant and time the variable”*.

Declaration for Province:

Based on the changes made since the 2009/2010 school year and an examination of the results that have been collected at Spruce Grove Composite High School and we understand the results from all project schools, we recommend that the 25 hour per credit requirement should be removed for all schools in the province.

Comments on the recommendations for the Province:

- This should be a school based decision. There is no point in removing the Carnegie Unit if there is no support from the school or its central administration.
- This should not prevent schools from exploring alternatives. There is no one best solution – having one way is contrary to the spirit of the project.
- Flexibility should be embraced province wide, but this should also occur in concert with changes to the structure of curriculum, course structure, current graduation requirements, accountability pillar and should embrace a differentiated assessment model.
- Schools embarking on flexibility enhancement must be assured a secured funding model in order to promote risk taking and ultimately innovative approaches to program delivery.
- It is extremely important that the 16 schools involved in the 4 year HSFEP be allowed to mentor, share their experiences (good and bad) to assist all high schools in making this transformation. It is impossible for teachers to work in isolation given the shift in emphasis from teacher controlled to student centered learning. For example:
 - What does Personalized Learning Time look like for a whole department/school?
 - What does seminar time look like if students move to where they need to be?
 - How does the community learn to understand the shift, accept the changes and that this is truly good for learning?
 - What do flexible student timetables look like?
 - Sharing stories.
 - Sharing these stories would be extremely helpful for a provincial move such as this.
- Criteria should be established to assess the readiness of individual schools and school districts (perhaps something resembling the application process at the onset of the pilot project) before exemptions are

granted. As well, progressive process goals should be established to ensure that targets are met as schools and school districts transition towards flexibility.

- Flexibility in programming allows students the opportunity to transition into programs that better fit their changing needs.
- Schools must be allowed to confront the reality that technological globalization has lessened the prevalence of the nine to five workday and geographical limitations. The result is blurred timelines, real-time communication and unlimited access to information. It’s a small world after all...

Measures:

Measure	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Previous 3 year avg	trend
HS Comp (3 yr)	79.7	79.4	82.1	82.1	79.1	pos
HS Comp (4 yr)	80.7	84.3	83.7	XXX	82.6	pos
Drop Out Rates	2.8	2.4	2.9	2.9	2.9	stay
Diploma Exam Participation	52.9	58.6	53.9	53.9	52.5	pos
Diploma Exam Acceptable	89.4	87.8	86.9	86.4	88.3	neg
Diploma Exam Excellence	16.0	19.5	16.7	16.0	18.5	neg
Course Completions	23.8	23.8	23.8	20.3	23.8	neg
Student Migration	9.4	12.2	13.4	XXX	12.5	stay
Intellectual Engagement		42.0	49.0	47.5	44.8	pos
Student Quality of Education	95.0	89.0	93.0	91.0	92.3	neg
Student Quality of Teaching	90.0	83.0	90.0	88.0	87.7	stay
Parent Quality of Education	84.0	94.0	86.0	84.0	88.0	neg
Parent Quality of Teaching	83.0	90.0	85.0	79.0	86.0	neg
Parent Improve or Stay	69.0	73.0	76.0	65.0	72.7	neg
Teacher Quality of Education	97.0	95.0	92.0	91.0	94.7	neg
Teacher Quality of Teaching	93.0	100.0	94.0	96.0	95.7	stay
Teacher Improve or Stay	74.0	95.0	62.0	73.0	77.0	neg

Evidence and analysis to justify recommendations on Page 1:

- The reliance on Outreach has diminished, and the enrollment in Summer School programs has diminished as well.
- It is difficult to attribute the changes solely to HSFEF when there have been significant changes in Central administration, school administration and the teaching staff. All of these changes impact how the community views what occurs within the building.
- Retaining more students and having them successfully complete high school is the primary goal of all. Thus the decrease in drop outs and an increase in graduation rates are all positive signals that this project should be maintained.
- The decline in perceived quality of education is troubling though not unexpected. It is not uncommon for change to be viewed negatively until the change becomes the norm. For example the nay saying and mockery of the “mouse” when it was first introduced would have one believing it had no future. Yet today devices without a mouse, mouse pad, and touch screen are unimaginable.
- Tell Them From Me Survey (TTFM) results show that students value the flex time they receive through PLT days and Seminar time
- TTFM survey results indicate that the vast majority of students do not feel connected to an adult in the school. The exploration of ways to develop relationships between staff and students will continue.

- Decrease in acceptable and excellent achievement results means more emphasis must be placed not only on increased flexibility in structure but also on student engagement and responsibility, as well as innovative teacher practice.
- The increase in both the three and four year high school completion rate affirms the validity of the HSFEF.
- Increased diploma exam participation was complimented by a relatively consistent diploma acceptable standard. The one concern is that although the acceptable standard remained relatively steady, the standard of excellence has dropped. This is in part attributable to an increase in the number of students not only writing exams, but also writing exams at a higher level. A cursory look at the raw data reveals that the actual number attaining the standard of excellence, as opposed to percentage of students, has remained relatively static.
- Although the numbers would indicate otherwise, there remains a perception that the quality of both teaching and education is in a state of decline. This in part must be attributed to the stresses and tension inherent in a dynamic change in pedagogy that deviates from the traditional paradigm of education. This is highlighted by the contradiction that although there is a perception that the quality of education is in decline, *“teacher quality of teaching”* has improved since the onset of the project.
- The current high school completion rate has risen to 82.1% which is 8% higher than the Province. (Our 3 year high school completion rate is 79% - Province is 71.6%).
- Rutherford Scholarship eligibility rate (current year) results is 7% higher than the provincial rate.
- 85% of SGCHS students find value in seminar time where they can move to other areas of learning or receive some one-on-one help.
- The current dropout rate is also lower than the Provincial average due in part to personalized learning, students being able to work at their own pace, InReach Centre, Outreach Centre, after school tutorials and shifting teacher practices.

Observations:

Structural changes that have evolved at our school.

- Grade 10 cohort provides more choice for students within Physical Education and Information Technology. It also provides opportunities to re-do, repeat or replace the portions of a course students did not successfully complete.
- All year courses in grade 10 provide the same opportunity to mature throughout the year without losing courses in the first semester.
- Flex time: opportunity for students to self-direct, determine their needs, and get help in the areas of those needs.
- Seminar: Ten minutes from each eighty-two minute block has been aggregated into rotating seminar block. The premise is to actively engage students in their own learning by providing them with the autonomy to determine and allocate their time and effort into the learning that requires the most attention.
- As well, Seminar time serves the dual function of allowing teachers more one on one access to students to address specific learning needs without being encumbered with whole class instruction.

- **Personalized Learning Time (PLT):** PLT is essentially a reallocation of scheduled time within a fixed timetable. Although often perceived as ‘Flex time’, this definition does not encompass that students can be specifically directed by teachers to complete or re-do assignments and exams.
- Although students initially treated PLT as a ‘catch up day’, increasingly students are utilizing the schools resources in a proactive manner by seeking remediation, not only from their specifically assigned teachers, but whichever teacher is available to address challenges in their learning.
- With a significant population that accesses school buses, PLT is invaluable in not only accessing teachers, but also in expanding cooperative learning opportunities beyond lunch hours.
- Diversity of programming, InReach, CTS classes combining yearlong classes Math/Science and English/Social.
- In order to change the culture and instructional practices, the existing structure would have to change. They would need to gently nudge teachers out of their comfort zone from the traditional 82 minute blocks of time. The following structural changes were implemented:
 - All blocks shortened to 72 minutes creating a Seminar time of 30 minutes every day attached to a different block.
 - Introduced a bi-weekly 3 hour Personalized Learning Time (PLT) where students go to the learning areas they need help with.
 - Student Teacher Advocacy Team (STAT) was not successful after 3 years so it has been removed.
 - Core courses at the grade 10 level are all year courses and the Math/Science teachers and English/Social teachers are paired.
 - All teachers’ assignments include at least one section of grade 10 students.
 - Physical Education, Information Processing and CALM teachers are teamed for grade 10 cohort groupings of up to 90 students. (This provides choice of activities and the number of credits a student wishes to obtain in Physical Education and Information Processing).
 - Teacher collaborative times are incorporated into the master timetable by departments.
 - Created an InReach Center for students to take ADL materials or students having difficulty maintaining acceptable standards due to attendance/illness. This Center has a Coordinator and academic teachers assigned to assist with learning.
 - The Outreach Center has been structured to allow students to complete and/or re-do courses during Summer School if they need more time. Outreach is open Wednesday evenings to accommodate young mothers and students with full-time employment.
 - After school study hall or tutorial is available 3:30 to 5:00 pm. (Voluntary or assigned).

Culture changes that have evolved at our school.

- As time is no longer a constant in student learning, there has been a cultural shift in having students complete learning activities to demonstrate mastery. Timelines for completion are based on student readiness which is particular to individual students as opposed to finishing assignments before arbitrary deadlines.
- The occurrences of 'busy work', worksheets, chapter questions, etc., have been on the decline in classrooms and are less prominent in student summative assessment. Quantity has become subordinate to quality in terms of assessment focusing more on feedback as opposed to measurement.
- InReach has made learning available to learners that for a variety of reasons require a modified program within a school environment yet struggle, if immersed in a complete self-directed learning environment such as an Outreach Centre.
- Paired teachings have promoted a culture of teachers getting to know and track grade 10 students better, as they spend the entire year with them and also provide opportunity to collaborate with each other on strategies for student success.
- Students are now allowed choice in programming, including the selection of the activity they want to take part in to meet the learner outcomes (examples: Physical Education activities, novel study, CTS).
- Daily Seminar time and Personalized Learning Times place students in the position of being responsible for their own learning. This requires teachers to know where their students are at in their learning so they can effectively address gaps in student learning.
- The flexibility in the amount of time a student requires to successfully complete a course has certainly contributed to student engagement, increased high school completion rates and decreased dropout rates.
- The shift in culture has also pushed teachers to question pedagogical practices and begin to make changes that improves student learning. Although there is much work yet to be done, considerable strides have been made in the right direction to truly support and meet the needs of all learners.
- Despite the difficulties inherent in any cultural shift, students and staff are increasingly willing to innovate and take risks in learning and instruction.

Pedagogical and instructional practices that have evolved at our school.

- Increased use of social media as a vehicle to increase student participation and engagement. Eight teachers were involved to achieve this end in the PSD Learning Leader project.
- Student centered learning practices are required to address the diversity of our learners and flexibility with their program. Professional Development opportunities are increasingly focused on pedagogical and assessment practices as opposed to subject specific Professional Development. (Subject specific conferences).
- Teachers in the humanities and Math/Sciences working with the same group of 30 students, team teaching, flexibility in the number of days they work with that class, teachers providing different novel studies for student choice.
- An increase in positive feedback/formative assessment (decrease in summative) such as teachers involving students in building rubrics and a greater emphasis on critical thinking activities.

- In terms of creating a safe and caring environment, the shared ‘ownership’ of a group of grade ten students allows for two sets of eyes, discussing observations and sharing concerns over the course of the entire school year and builds relationships for the remainder of their high school careers.

Future planning:

Planned Change:	Rationale:
Teacher Collaborative Time (TCT) .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty requires increased opportunity to collaboratively focus on instructional practice, particularly with respect to providing formative feedback to students supporting critical thinking. • TCT provides the opportunity for greater emphasis on practices, formative assessment, assessment as learning and for discussion surrounding how to promote student success. • Teachers utilize time to improve understanding of the Program of Studies and curriculum in order to identify priority outcomes (the big ideas) from the Curriculum and focus on the must haves “for all learners” and the “nice to haves” for enrichment. • These targets and goals need to be specific and concise to all students, teachers and parents. (What do I need to learn, how do I know when I get there and what do I do if I don’t?) • Teachers continue to improve metacognition strategies (learn how to learn) for students. • Teachers continue to regularly re-examine current research in relation to the program of studies. • As lifelong learners, teachers develop a greater understanding of instructional practices that have the most significant impact on student success.
Staff meetings and Department Head meetings focused on instructional practice over business items.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research reveals that there is a high effect on student achievement (and teacher wellness) if the leaders in the building are shown to be involved in teacher development and learning. • Instructional practices will be focused on activities such as critical thinking; student centered learning, student engagement, assessment for and as learning, the

	<p>importance of immediate positive feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once teachers have this understanding, have been provided with exemplars, modeling, peer observation, they will be able to effectively transfer these into practice.
<p>Teacher collaboration time, and common classes scheduled to run concurrently are built into the master timetable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concurrent classes permit greater student and staff choice by offering a variety of curricular and pedagogical methods such as choice of literature in English or ways to represent concepts in Math. • Teachers empower students by allowing increased opportunity to progressively control their own learning. • Allows teachers to collaborate in a timely and regular fashion.
<p>An increase in embedded, interactive technology incorporated into instructional practices and student learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology is a tool that is highly conducive to the philosophy of anytime, anyplace, any pace. • Increased professional development for all staff along with modeling, peer assistance and support for the following assistive technologies, blogging, twitter, Google Apps, D2L, etc.
<p>Student Teacher Advocacy Team (STAT) will be reorganized and reintroduced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows that if students feel they have one strong adult advocate in the building they are more successful. • Positive relationship building and trust leads to a safe and caring school. • Other schools have experienced a marked decrease in student discipline issues, teacher centric approaches to instruction, negative attitude to change among stakeholders and the frenzy and stress that often typifies a high school environment.

Foundational Principles that guided our decision making:

It is important to consider that the HSFEP is an initiative that has not been implemented in isolation. As a result, other initiatives involving such areas as assessment have been complimented by the program delivery methods encompassed by the HSFEP. Ensuring that student learning is the focus is a simpler task when the constraints of time are removed. For example, PLT days, once considered days utilized to catch up on missed and incomplete work are increasingly being utilized as embedded time for remediation and enrichment.

The following themes were the foundation for designing courses and different learning opportunities:

- Personalization.
- Flexible learning environments.
- Educator roles and professional development.

Moving forward, in addition to the aforementioned themes, greater emphasis will be directed towards:

- Student/teacher relationships.
- Mastery of Learning.
- Rigorous and relevant curriculum.