

Port Angeles School District
Collaborative Time Follow-Up Report
August 28, 2006

BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2003, the Port Angeles School District Board of Directors received a report from its Fiscal Advisory Committee that included a recommendation to reduce transportation costs by standardizing Wednesday “late start” times across all district schools. After taking public comment on the recommendations, the board determined to study further the underlying issue of teacher collaboration time. In the summer of 2003, the board of directors elected to establish a Collaborative Time Task Force, and did so at its August 25, 2003 meeting.

The Collaborative Time Task Force comprised sixteen members, including one board member, Jessica Schreiber; one teachers’ association representative, Amity Butler; one classified association representative or staff member (the appointee did not attend); one elementary school certificated staff member (unfilled); one middle school certificated staff member, Laura Knowles; one high school level certificated staff member, Gary McLaughlin; two elementary school principals, Mary Hebert and Diann Lavik; one secondary school administrator, Brad Boudreau; four parents, each from a different elementary or middle school, Amy Ward, Robin Gibson, Holli Hilt, and an appointee who did not attend; two community representatives without children in school, Carol Knebes and Lisa Predovich; and the task force’s non-voting chair, Mary Ann Unger.

The Collaborative Time Task Force held its first meeting on October 16, 2003, and set a meeting schedule through February, 2004. The task force met on a regular basis, Thursday evenings, at least once per month.

The Collaborative Time Task Force was charged with the responsibility to (a) study relevant data and comparative statistics; (b) research program operations and student performance improvements in districts where collaborative time has occurred; (c) develop a recommendation regarding collaborative time at elementary schools; and (d) report on evidence of the impact of collaborative time use at middle schools.

The Collaborative Time Task Force was provided four articles that described collaborative time as a component of a professional development system that is designed to improve student achievement. Information about the articles distributed and a short summary of each follows:

Chapter Three, “The Deep Meaning of Inside Collaboration”, from Michael Fullan’s book *Change Forces: The Sequel*.

During examination of high performing schools, the high performance was traced to whether or not the school had a “high professional community.” High professional community was defined by teacher collaboration for the purpose of improving student learning and taking collaborative responsibility for student learning. They cite professional communities as a characteristic of systemic restructuring contrasted with conventional school practice where teachers work more autonomously and there may be little meaningful professional exchange among co-workers.

The National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development*.

This document reviews 12 standards for staff (or professional) development. It divides the standards into three major categories. Two standards, one in each of the two major categories, refer to collaborative time. In the category of Context Standards: Learning communities, Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district. In the category of Process Standards: Collaboration, Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to collaborate.

Washington State Professional Development Planning Guide, Part I, Teacher Professional Development.

Washington State has developed a planning guide for use within school districts. The guide provides research-based recommendations for improving instruction. Among the recommendations cited is collaboration among teachers. Two of the items listed as research-based effective practices state: (1) Uses a coherent, long term professional development process and provides for the allocation of sufficient time, funds and materials for full implementation. (2) Prepares educators to work together to build expertise and build leadership capacity.

Sustaining Continuous School Improvement Through Collaboration.

This very brief, two page document defines collaboration, provides a list of reasons for its importance, provides guidelines for implementation, and a list of additional resources regarding collaboration.

The discussion following the review of the articles resulted in a consensus among task force members regarding the value and importance of time for teachers to collaborate. It was agreed that an exemplary professional development system includes ample time for teachers to collaborate about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and assessment data.

The Collaborative Time Task Force members came to unanimous consensus that time for collaboration among teachers and administrators is an essential component of our district's efforts to improve instruction and increase student achievement. Task Force research and study have shown that districts achieving ever greater gains in student performance include collaboration time as a component of their overall professional development system. As this group believed the improvement of teaching and learning was a priority for our district, the collaborative time proposal seemed to hold great promise in contributing to this goal.

The Collaborative Time Task Force members wanted to make sure there was an accountability system in place for the use of the collaborative time. Suggestions they proposed are listed below:

1. Reports to the board and community on how time is planned for use and is used.
2. Ideas for keeping parents informed included: School newsletter, website, back to school night, letter from the principal, classroom newsletter, etc.
3. Demonstration that there is an improvement in student learning
4. Use of a "model" or "structure" for the use of collaborative time.

5. Board reports regarding use of time at each school.
6. Teachers and administrators will need training in collaboration techniques and skills, to ensure quality collaboration time.

In summary, the recommendation of the Collaborative Time Task Force was as follows:

- Early dismissal on a uniform schedule for all elementary students at the grade 4 and 5 dismissal time;
- An accountability system in place to track and report the impacts of collaborative time;
- A reporting structure for the community and the board of directors;
- All schools must maintain as many instructional hours as possible and the district average for grades 1-12 may not fall below the State's minimum basic education requirements; and
- Collaboration skills professional development for teachers and administrators.

PROCESS

In the spring of 2006, the Port Angeles Education Association chose to administer a collaborative time survey, titled *Early Release/Late Start Survey*, to teachers in its membership throughout the district. Essentially the survey asked two questions: (1) What's working/not working with early release or late start at your building? (2) If early release/late start continues for next year, what improvements should be made? The survey also asked responding teachers to respond yes or no to the following question: Should early release/late start continue next year?

This particular survey was returned by a total of 97 of 272 teachers in the district, a 36 percent return. The grade level breakdown includes responses from 51 elementary teachers, 15 middle school teachers and 32 high school teachers. The association conducted the survey subsequent to bargaining an agreement with the district regarding the use of collaboration time (see Appendix B).

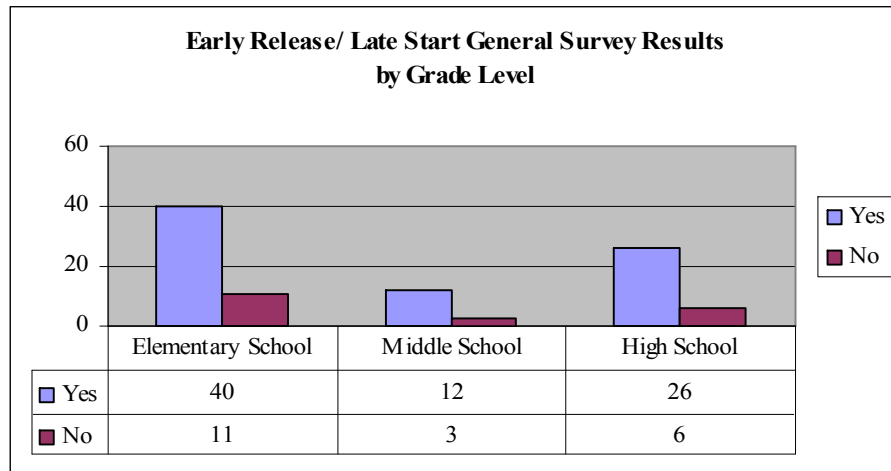
Another data source contributing to this report is the Continuous School Improvement Plan, or CSIP, reporting structure attended to by each school in the district. Three times during the year schools reported on their progress toward implementing their CSIPs. Their CSIP reports included a structure to call out their collaborative time activities and where they connected to the school CSIP and the district strategic plan.

FINDINGS

The results of the Port Angeles Education Association survey overwhelmingly support the continuing of early release/late start for next year. This was true for all three grade levels in the district. While the number of surveys returned did not equal the number of teachers across the district, it is the only survey conducted on this topic during the past year and therefore is considered the only available representation of teacher opinions on this topic for the past year of collaborative work in the district.

The chart at right displays the proportion of yes and no responses to the question: Should early release/late start continue next year?

In response to the two questions previously mentioned in this report, a number of different narrative thoughts were expressed by teachers.



These comments center on who directs the time, how agendas for the time are or are not set, how collaborative teams are grouped, etc. Appendix B displays results for each school from which teachers returned surveys.

In the task force recommendations surrounding accountability, there was a clear expectation that improved student learning was a desirable outcome of this collaboration time focus. While it is difficult to draw a direct line from collaborative time use to improved student achievement, it is clear that our student achievement is improving at every level in our school district. Research certainly supports the theory of action that effective collaborative time increases the instructional capacity of the system and contributes to the sustainability of successful teaching and learning initiatives.

The task force expected that there would be routine reporting on the use of collaborative time at each school. This reporting expectation has been met through the CSIP reporting protocol. In general, these reports have indicated a focus on instruction in both building horizontal and vertical teams. At the secondary level, grade level teams and department groups have been the primary structural themes as collaborative time has been reported. Port Angeles High School also added the Small Learning Community (SLC) structure as a collaborative time grouping reported.

Another task force expectation was that principals and teachers would receive training on effective collaboration skills and techniques in an effort to ensure quality collaboration time. This has been a focus for the district during the past academic year. The focus began in the summer of 2005 at the Summer Administrative Institute, where the instructional leadership team spent considerable time on the work of understanding the development and implementation of effective and accountable professional learning communities. The team worked extensively during the summer and throughout the year with a text describing award-winning Richard J. Murphy School Principal Mary Russo’s collaborative time strategies.¹ This text documents the work of a high performing elementary school staff in Boston and the collaborative time strategies they employed.

¹ Cunningham, J., ed. (2004) *Creating Professional Learning Communities*. Dorchester, MA: Project for School Innovation.

A second text the instructional leadership team studied was *On Common Ground*, a text authored by a variety of leading educational theorists across the country that documents their beliefs about effective professional learning communities.² This text informed the instructional leadership work of district and school instructional leaders. Several schools staffs also chose this text for teacher leaders in their schools. It continues to be a resource in the collaborative work principals and teachers do in this district.

Professional development continued this summer with the district instructional leadership team as Andy Platt, a renowned author on this topic, worked with the principals to further their skills in developing and supporting the work of accountable professional learning communities. District teachers and principals are on the cutting edge of this research. The impact of effective collaborative teams on powerful teaching and learning is becoming widely noted. Professional development will continue this coming year in the effective use of collaboration time, techniques and skills to sustain accountable professional learning communities.

While there is great promise for ever increasing student achievement with the effective utilization of collaborative team strategies, not all teachers are satisfied with the structure and process of the current collaborative time practices. Several of the narrative comments are not as positive as we might hope. A focus for the coming academic year will be to authentically respond to the concerns laid out in the narrative commentary connected to this survey, without losing the positive energy, focus and productivity attached to the current collaborative time practices in place at this time. Perceptions being what they are, a personal reflection on the work in which we are all collectively engaged can still be improved. There is certainly a commitment to the effective use of collaborative time in an effort to sustain the powerful teaching and learning that currently underscores the work we do in our district.

Accountable professional learning communities are necessary to sustain the student achievement growth we are experiencing as a school district. The commitment to professional development to this end is unwavering, as is the expectation for accountability for this valuable resource, our use of collaborative time. It is clear: research has positively documented that this is an important strategy in support of our district vision and mission.

Written comments about this report may be sent via U.S. Mail to:

Superintendent's Office
Port Angeles School District
216 East Fourth Street
Port Angeles, WA 98362

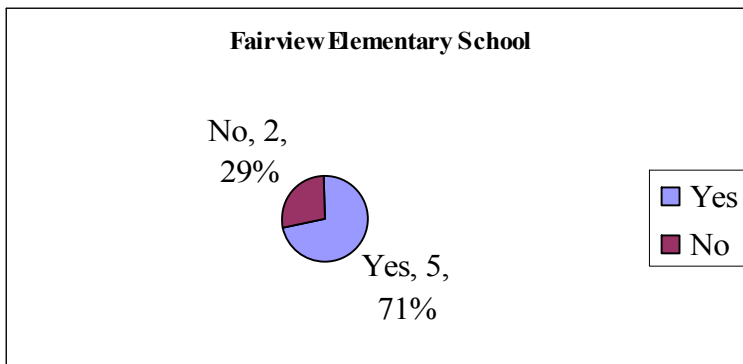
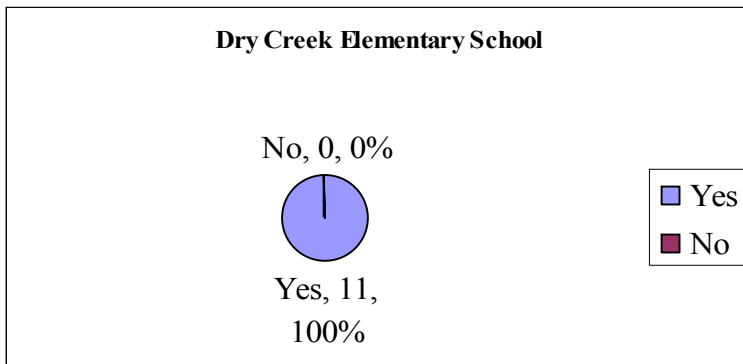
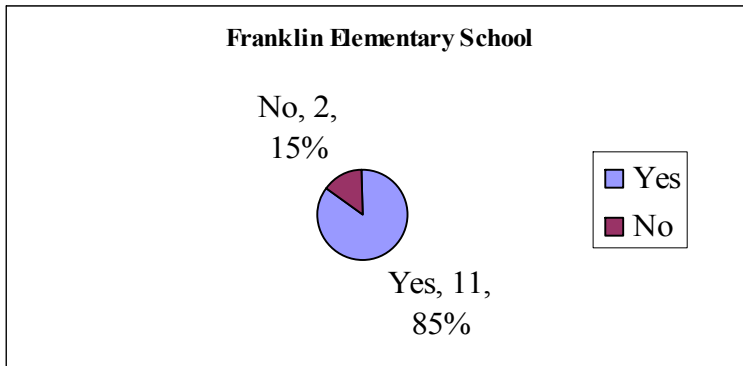
² DuFour, R., R. Eaker & R DuFour, eds. (2005) *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.

Appendix A

Individual Data Tables

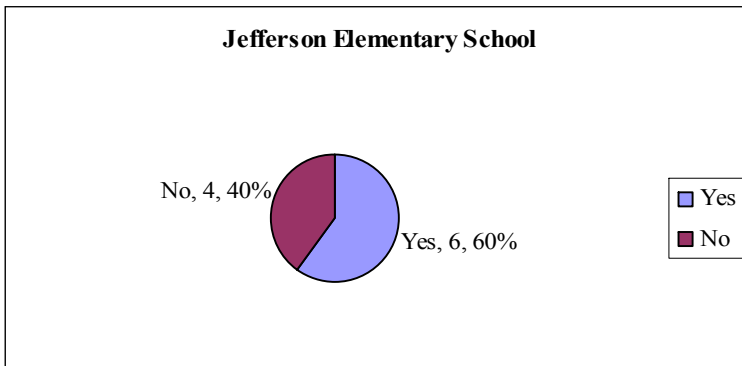
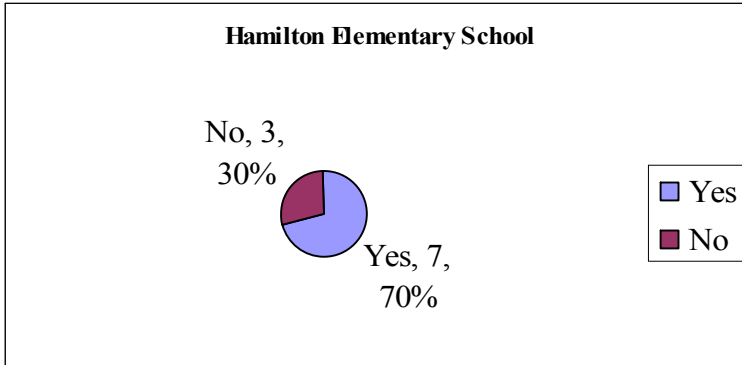
The following graphs depict individual schools' responses to the question: Should early release/late start continue next year?

Elementary Schools



Appendix A, cont.

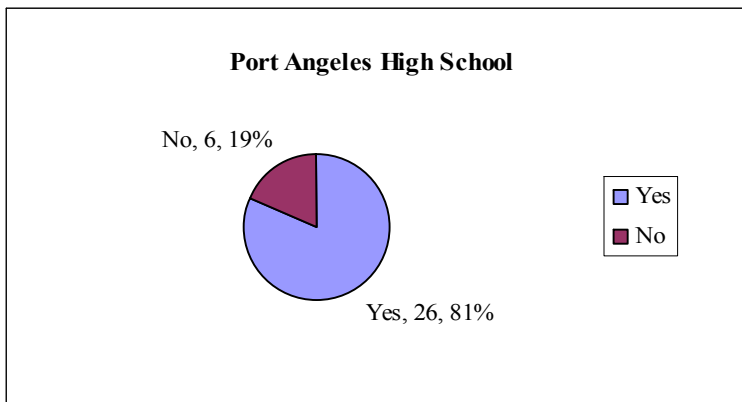
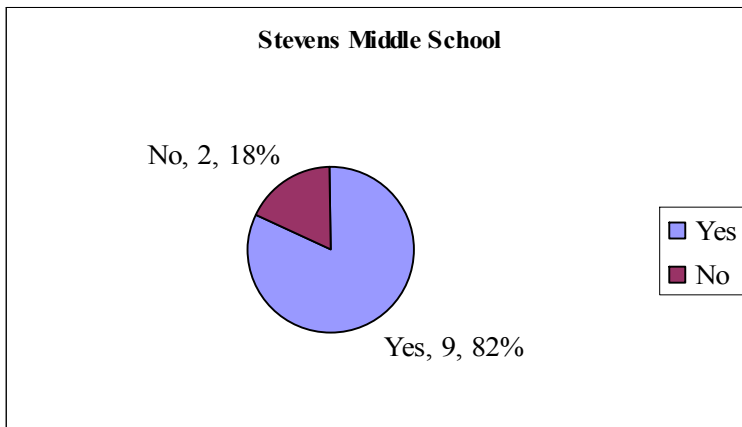
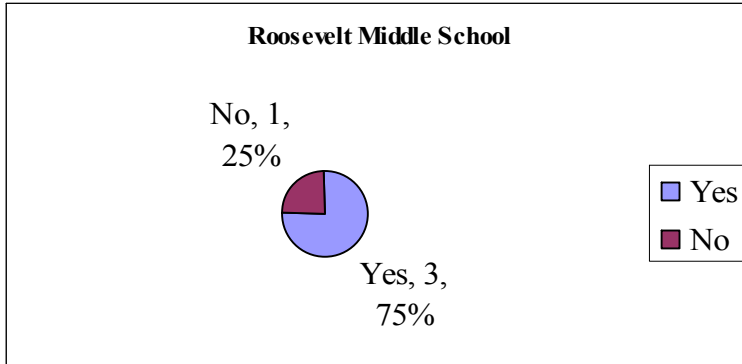
Individual Data Tables



Appendix A, cont.

Individual Data Tables

Secondary Schools



Appendix B

Collective Bargained Agreement Language

The Association and District have a mutual interest in collaboration, and in assuring that the time be relevant to the classroom, meet the needs of all stakeholders and be valuable in supporting teachers and instruction. Professional development is best supported through feedback, individual reflection and group inquiry. There is a commitment to mutual planning and prioritizing teacher input, for the use of collaborative time.

The collaboration work will be planned jointly with administrators and teachers and coordinated weekly so as to ensure attendance of all key people at grade levels, departmental, and curriculum meetings. Collaboration time may be adjusted and/or suspended 3-4 times each year to meet the needs of teachers to prepare: reports of student progress through report cards, parent conferences, learning plans and/or the scoring or recording of district assessment. A plan of this kind develops a professional learning community that supports and sustains strong schools and teaching practice

Source: Collective Bargained Agreement between the Port Angeles Education Association and the Port Angeles School District, 2005-08, Article IV, Section 8, Late Start, Early Release and Non Student Instruction Days.