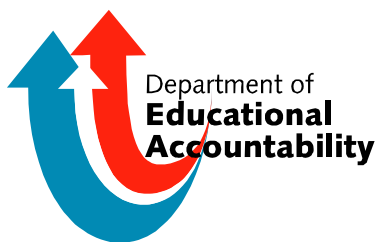


# **MODIFIED SCHOOL CALENDAR (MSC) EVALUATION REPORT**

**JANUARY 2004**



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# **MODIFIED SCHOOL CALENDAR (MSC) REPORT**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Through its vision and mission, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) is committed “to educate all students to meet high academic standards and to prepare all students to be responsible citizens in the 21st century.” Over the years, FCPS has responded to this challenge by developing innovative programs and services for students. Among the greatest challenges for FCPS and school divisions across the country is providing programs and services that maximize instructional time and build on the knowledge acquired by students over time. Towards these ends, FCPS supports a group of ten schools in implementation of a modified school calendar (MSC).

The modified school calendar is often referred to as the year-round calendar or extended school year. The concept is not new to education, and most often involves students attending school throughout the year, with short breaks (called intersessions) rather than the extended summer break. As Palmer and Bemis (1999) note in their paper entitled *Year-Round Education*, “the first modified school calendar in the United States opened in Bluffton, Indiana, in 1904 for the purpose of increasing building capacity and student achievement. Maximizing facilities and improving educational outcomes by minimizing summer learning loss, offering remediation during intersessions, and implementing creative curricular programs are still cited today along with the potential for saving money.” Palmer and Bemis (1999) conclude that “most of the research to date has been incomplete or poorly designed, leaving educators at a loss for solid data upon which to draw conclusions.”

In the spring of 1996, one FCPS elementary school took the lead in establishing the modified school calendar and verifying through empirical evidence its impact on students. Through work with a committee of staff and parents, Timber Lane Elementary School began investigating a year-round or modified school calendar schedule as a means for minimizing summer learning loss and minimizing the amount of “after summer” remediation instruction. A series of community meetings were held throughout the fall of 1996, culminating with a survey of parents. This survey indicated that a majority of parents wished to transition the school to a modified calendar. The 1997-1998 school year was devoted to a year of planning for the transition. In late summer of 1998, Timber Lane Elementary opened its doors as the first FCPS school to adopt a modified school calendar.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF SCHOOLS**

As Timber Lane Elementary documented its success with implementing the MSC, other FCPS schools with similar concerns began to show interest in the alternative calendar. During the 2001-2002 school year, eight schools implemented a modified calendar with the approval of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). The eight schools include Dogwood Elementary, Franconia Elementary and Center, Glen Forest Elementary, Graham Road Elementary, Timber Lane Elementary, Glasgow Middle, Falls Church High, and Stuart High.

For the 2002-2003 school year, ten FCPS schools submitted applications to the VDOE to begin their school year prior to Labor Day 2002. These schools include those eight from the prior year in addition to Annandale Terrace Elementary and Parklawn Elementary. In 2003-2004, the same ten schools began the school year prior to Labor Day by applying for a waiver to the VDOE. The application requires FCPS to establish procedures for evaluating the MSC. This report serves as the evaluation document to fulfill the VDOE requirement for evaluation of the MSC in FCPS.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The modified school calendar takes two forms in FCPS, an elementary and secondary model. While the goals for reducing summer learning loss and raising levels of student performance remain the same, the methods for reaching those goals differ for each model.

### **Elementary model**

The model utilized by the seven elementary MSC schools in FCPS is based upon the one chosen by Timber Lane Elementary School in 1996. It is called the 45-15 model in which school is in session for 45 days or 9 weeks, then students are on a break for 15 days or 3 weeks. The model allows students to have an extended school year, with optional two-week intersessions, during which remedial opportunities focusing on reading and mathematics, intensive English as a second language study, enrichment, and acceleration are provided.

### **Secondary model**

The modified school calendar at the secondary schools is organized in a different manner than at FCPS elementary schools. The innovative feature that distinguishes the secondary modified school calendar from the traditional calendar is an eight-week summer trimester that allows students to complete up to four additional semester courses, continue with courses that they have not yet mastered, or complete two year-long courses. For students to complete the summer trimester in time to take the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests during the summer administration, it is necessary to begin the summer semester mid-June and shift the beginning of the fall semester to mid-August.

## **EVALUATION DESIGN AND DATA**

The overall purpose of this evaluation is to determine if the MSC is associated with positive outcomes (academic performance and other conditions for participating students). This report consists of analyses of information in three categories: background, student achievement outcomes, and additional impacts attributed to the MSC by the schools. Data were collected prior to and throughout implementation for eight of ten schools described in this report. Annandale Terrace Elementary and Parklawn Elementary began implementation of MSC in fall 2002.

Table 1 outlines the specific types of data that will be used to address a common set of evaluation questions for each of the ten FCPS MSC schools. The report compares student

achievement in most recent school years to performance in the prior school years to answer the question: To what extent was there academic growth at the assessed grade levels? Additional evaluation questions are listed on page 4.

**Table 1**  
**MSC Individual School Level Report Framework**

<b>I. Background</b>
School Program Implementation Narrative (1-2 pages), including goals for implementing MSC
School Demographics Percent of Students on Free and Reduced-Price Meals Percent of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students Mobility Rate Student Attendance
Support for MSC Staff Survey Results on Support for MSC Parent Survey Results on Support for MSC
<b>II. Outcomes: Student Achievement</b>
<i><b>Prior to Implementation (baseline year)</b></i> Developmental Reading Assessment (elementary only) Stanford 9 TA (elementary only) Standards of Learning
<i><b>After Implementation (current year)</b></i> Developmental Reading Assessment (elementary only) Stanford 9 TA (elementary only) Standards of Learning
<b>III. Additional Impacts Attributed to MSC by School (optional)</b>
Program Impact Narrative (2-3 pages) based on data, covering areas impacted such as: Curriculum Planning Instruction Remediation Other Student Achievement Measures

## **Student Achievement Measures**

Multiple measures of student achievement were used to document change in student achievement over time for section II of the individual school reports. These measures include state required assessments of student achievement, supplemented by locally selected measures. Following is a brief description of each measure.

***Developmental Reading Assessment–Elementary Schools Only.*** The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is an individually administered test of first grade students’ oral reading skill based on a graded series of increasingly difficult passages. Results are reported as a reading text level ranging from “A” to level 44, with 16 established as the expected level for grade 1 and 28 established as expected level for grade 2. To achieve a specific text level, the student must read the passage with at least 90 percent accuracy and display a basic understanding of the text. Numbers presented are unadjusted figures with results from all students participating in the assessment.

***Stanford 9 TA–Elementary Schools Only.*** The Stanford 9 TA is a norm-referenced test that is part of the Virginia State Assessment Program. The test is administered in the fall of each school year to students in grades 4, 6, and 9. This report will utilize the data for elementary schools only. The test is designed to measure a student’s knowledge in each of the content areas. The Stanford 9 TA is comprised of five subtests: reading, mathematics, language, history/social science, and science. Numbers presented are based on all students participating in the assessment under standard conditions. The Stanford 9 TA will not be a part of the evaluation after this report as the use of the measure was discontinued at the state level in spring 2003.

***Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests–Grades 3, 5, 8, and End-of-Course (EOC).*** The Standards of Learning tests are criterion-referenced tests that are a part of the Virginia State Assessment Program. The tests are designed to measure students’ mastery of the curriculum in each content area. The tests are administered in the spring of each school year to students in grades 3, 5, 8, and enrolled in specific high school level courses. Students in grade 4 participate in the grade 5 history/social science assessment. The SOL tests are administered in the following areas: English, mathematics, history/social science, science, and technology (grades 5 and 8 only). The report will focus on assessments in the four core content areas and will not utilize the information from the technology SOL tests. Numbers presented are the adjusted pass rates utilized by the Virginia Department of Education. In addition, pass rates for limited English proficient (LEP) students are presented separately as they are not represented in the adjusted pass rates and are a targeted population for many MSC schools.

Following the discussion of academic achievement is a discussion of impacts in other area. These data are discussed in detail in the form of individual school reports for each of the schools. The individual school reports address the following questions:

- To what extent did the school community support the adoption of a modified school calendar? (Section I of individual school reports)

- To what extent did schools implement the modified school calendar? (Section I of individual school reports)
- To what extent did the students benefit academically from the implementation of a modified school calendar? (Sections II and III of individual school reports)

In addition, the summary will reflect upon lessons learned throughout implementation in the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years and provide recommendations to improve implementation in the 2003-2004 school year.

### **Individual School Reports**

Annandale Terrace Elementary  
Dogwood Elementary  
Franconia Elementary  
Glen Forest Elementary  
Graham Road Elementary  
Parklawn Elementary  
Timber Lane Elementary  
Glasgow Middle  
Falls Church High  
Stuart High

## SUMMARY

The previous individual school reports demonstrate that implementation of a MSC involves schools in a multitude of uniquely positive experiences and processes. Experiences related to implementing a MSC at any given school will vary as teachers and administrators seek to meet the specific needs of their student population. Notwithstanding the uniqueness, the suitability of the MSC in FCPS is supported by the findings summarized in three broad categories: level of interest and support for MSC, quality of implementation, and benefits for students.

### **Level of Interest and Support**

While the specific numbers varied, each school had the majority of staff and parents supporting the adoption of the MSC at their schools. On October 22, 2001, the Fairfax County School Board adopted a regulation that set standards for levels of support for the decision to adopt a modified school calendar, although eight of the ten schools began the adoption process prior to this date. The standards outline that 60 percent of all staff must support the decision before the idea is presented to the school community. The percentages of parents voting for adoption of the modified school calendar ranged from 75 to 86 percent in the seven elementary schools and ranged from 65 to 82 percent in the three secondary schools. Parents and staff are surveyed only during the initial year that adoption is considered.

### **Quality of Implementation**

Of the ten FCPS schools involved in the MSC, two have been implementing the program for just over one school year. The remaining eight schools opened their doors prior to summer of 2001. Five of the eight were elementary schools that offered intersession courses to the majority of their students three times during the school year in October, January, and April. The three secondary schools began the school year early to offer a summer trimester to students. These secondary schools are currently implementing their second summer trimester. Schools demonstrated that they can plan and follow through with plans to implement the MSC.

Schools engaged in many strategies to ensure the quality, throughout implementation, of MSC. Elementary schools took advantage of the new calendar arrangement to increase the amount and efficiency of planning time and to reteach at-risk students on a quarterly basis instead of waiting for summer. Secondary schools are still working on improving their use of the new calendar to maximize its benefits.

### **Benefits for Students**

***Student Achievement.*** Data indicate that schools started with different levels of student achievement. Post-implementation data for the elementary schools implementing a modified calendar yield increases but not in all areas of student achievement, perhaps in part due to factors beyond the schools' control. This finding, in light of the following discussion of related factors may suggest that the MSC was not the cause for the inconsistency in performance. It is most

likely these schools also would have had difficulty in achieving consistently high academic gains during this time period using the traditional calendar.

Across the seven elementary schools, performance in spring 2003 increased on 35 of 63 tests or 56 percent of tests in comparison to spring 2002. In spring 2002, performance for the three elementary schools implementing at that time showed increases on nine of 27 SOL tests or 33 percent of tests in comparison to spring 2001 (four tests at grade 3 plus five tests at grade 5 times three schools). At the middle school, performance in spring 2003 increased on three of five tests, while in spring 2002 performance increased on two of five SOL tests compared to spring 2001. At the high school, performance in spring 2003 increased on 19 of 22 SOL tests, while in 2002 performance increased on 18 of 22 SOL tests compared to spring 2001 (11 end-of-course tests times two high schools).

The mixed performance of increases and decreases is similar to performance in years prior to MSC. Therefore, student achievement was not negatively impacted by the MSC. Moreover, the percent of SOL tests showing increases increased from one-third to more than 50 percent. However, it is generally understood that 3-5 years are required to see reliable impacts of schoolwide restructuring efforts.

***LEP Student Achievement.*** Overall, all schools saw improvements over the past several years in the achievement of their LEP populations. However, it may be too early to ascertain the long-term impact of the MSC on LEP students. Across the seven elementary schools, LEP performance in spring 2003 increased on 29 of 63 tests, while in spring 2002 LEP performance increased on 35 of 45 SOL tests in comparison to spring 2001 (four tests at grade 3 plus five tests at grade 5 times five schools). At the middle school, LEP performance in spring 2003 increased on one of five SOL tests, while in spring 2002 LEP performance increased on two of five SOL tests compared to spring 2001. At the high schools, LEP performance in spring 2003 increased on 15 of 22 SOL tests the same as in spring 2002 (11 end-of-course tests times two high schools). Again, from these data it can be said that the achievement of these students has not been negatively impacted by the implementation of the MSC.

***Additional Benefits.*** In addition to student achievement, principals reflected upon additional impacts of the MSC. Four schools reported improved student behavior and decreases in student referrals, although one school reported the need for consistent discipline plans for the intersessions at the elementary level. Two elementary schools reported having the ability to start with new material within two weeks of beginning the school year instead of the 4-6 weeks they had experienced prior to implementation.

While schools had hypothesized that student attendance rates would increase by giving students breaks three times during the school year, student attendance rates generally remained stable with the largest increase seen by Glasgow Middle School (96.17 to 98.50). This finding suggests no negative impacts were observed for student attendance at the MSC schools. Similarly, four schools reported less teacher burnout, which ensured more consistency of instruction for students. In addition, all schools report that the modified school calendar helped to improve instruction, planning, enrichment, and remediation. It is the goal that these modifications will translate into increases in student achievement.

The implementation of the modified school calendar in FCPS is in the early stages. At the sites implementing MSC the longest (Dogwood and Timber Lane) preliminary results are promising. The remaining elementary schools have followed the lead of Timber Lane in planning their MSC program, especially in the design of successful intersession courses. The implementation of the MSC at the secondary level is also in the initial phase as schools currently implement the second summer trimester.

The overall goal for MSC was that there would be no negative impacts for participating students and that student achievement would first stabilize, then show improvement over time. The data described within indicate that student performance has not been negatively impacted by the MSC. The expectation in FCPS is that as schools have more experience in implementing their MSC plans, implementation will continue to improve and the impacts on students will continue to increase.

## REFERENCES

Palmer, E. A. & Bemis, A. E. (1999). *Year-Round Education*. Retrieved from University of Minnesota: College of Education and Human Development web site:  
<http://education.umn.edu/CAREI/Reports/default.html>