

Teacher Perceptions of School Culture after the Change from a Semester Schedule to a Trimester Schedule

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The participants of this phenomenological study were employed at a school that previously was not performing on assessments at a level equal to schools in the state comparison group. Due to low student achievement, school leaders explored pathways to improve instruction and changed the school schedule from a semester schedule to a trimester schedule in hopes of improving student and teacher performance. The perceptions of 11 educators who participated in the organizational change of the school schedule were examined. Themes emerged following a review of the interview data. The teachers perceived that they were unprepared for the pace of the trimester. They believed that students who took ownership of their learning were academically successful on the trimester schedule, but that trimester scheduling hindered relationship development with students. The teachers perceived that a strong sense of teacher collaboration existed under both schedules, but was impacted negatively when planning and training times were not shared.

Keywords: Organizational change, trimester schedule

Under the state accountability practices guided by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the 2009 update “Race to The Top,” school systems had goals for success that were based almost entirely on student performance on state and federal standardized tests (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015). While the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 provided more flexibility for accountability and assessment systems (Dragoset et al., 2016), the premise of these laws was that schools were in crisis and the implementation of standardized tests was the way to fix them (Rose, 2015). In today’s era of school improvement, schools continuously adjust their best practices in an attempt to improve student performance on state and federal assessments (Perryman, Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2011).

Teachers are the most important variable in school reform (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Marzano, 2003) and are on the front lines of the implementation of change initiatives. To maximize effectiveness, teachers need time to master curriculum, collaborate, and plan effective lessons with colleagues (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Marzano, 2003). Out of frustration with multiple change initiatives, some teachers change schools or leave the profession of education altogether (Keigher, 2010; Lasagna, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). While some teachers choose to leave the profession due to working conditions (Buchanan, 2010; Donaldson & Johnson, 2011), data on teacher working conditions are not generally considered by educational leaders seeking to improve student performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). The typical data pertaining to the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives relate to how students are performing in individual teachers’ classes on mock or authentic assessments (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). The answer to the question of what the experience of student preparation was like for the teacher can guide administrators in the implementation of other improvement initiatives. This study was conducted to explore those perceptions.

Purpose

School improvement often is based on student performance on state or federal assessments (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Murnane & Steele, 2007). Frequently, the specific effectiveness of campus initiatives is evaluated solely on student test data (Loeb et al., 2005). The Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) includes information about individual schools and school districts as well as a comprehensive state record. The report does not include information about the meanings that teachers ascribe to their experiences of preparing students or working together alongside other teachers in professional learning environments.

This phenomenological study was conducted to examine the perceptions of educators employed at a school that experienced a schedule change. The students at the campus at which the participants in this study were employed underperformed on state and federal assessments. As a part of the campus plan to alleviate low academic performance, campus leaders chose to change the school schedule from a seven-period-a-day semester schedule to a five-period-a-day trimester schedule. The campus operated under the trimester schedule during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years with the goals of providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate professionally with peers and providing additional time for academic tutoring and interventions for students. The campus transitioned back to the semester schedule during the 2016-2017 school year. The goal of the study was not to evaluate the schedule, but to gain knowledge of teachers’ perceptions of the change.

Research Questions

Three research questions directed this study. The questions addressed the areas of professional development, student remediation, and the ability of teachers to collaborate with their peers:

1. How do teachers perceive a change to the trimester schedule impacted their ability to participate in professional development with their colleagues?
2. How do teachers perceive that opportunities for student remediation in a trimester schedule impacted student learning?
3. How do teachers perceive a change of schedule affected a school's culture of collaboration?

Significance

Principals newly assigned to a campus often begin their work by talking with staff, reviewing data, and evaluating the organizational structure with which they were entrusted (Daresh & Alexander, 2015). Common areas for review include the campus budget, student performance on state and federal testing, school bell schedules, cultures, and systems for communication (Daresh & Alexander, 2015). Principals use data sources to explain the progress being made toward campus improvement goals. These data sources often include student performance on campus common assessments and teacher-created assessments. Intervention plans are created based on the data received (Daresh & Alexander, 2015). Principals design action plans that they believe best fit the needs of the campus.

An action plan aspect frequently used by principals is the implementation of a new school schedule. The effectiveness of the principals' action plans often is based on quantitative student assessment data (Coburn, Hill, & Spillane, 2016). These data sets can be void of input from the teachers who are responsible for implementing the plans (Noddings, 2015). Leadership and support from fellow teachers are necessary to improve teaching and learning (Fairmen, 2015). There is a need for "a specific organizational structure within each school in order for shared decision making to be successful" (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011, p. 36). The relevance of this research lies in the ability to understand better how teachers experienced the change of schedule from a semester to a trimester schedule. This knowledge of how teachers experience change can assist in determining future areas of consideration for other leaders who may be contemplating a similar organizational change.

Background Literature

Teacher attrition has been a continual problem facing public education (Certo & Fox, 2002; Cherniss, 2016). Teachers have cited poor working conditions such as limited resources and the ability to collaborate effectively with peers as reasons for leaving the profession (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011). This situation has created a challenge for educational leaders who work to ensure student performance while retaining professional educators (Coburn et al., 2016). Student performance and teacher retention can be impacted by teacher workday, tutoring and remediation, learning communities, school culture, and campus schedule.

Teacher Workday

The workday of a teacher is filled with time-intensive requirements. Teachers often work long hours and feel underpaid (Quicke, 2018). The amount of time in teachers' workdays often remains unchanged while required tasks increase (Richardson, 2016). Teacher perceptions of their workday can impact their decision to leave their current school or exit from the profession.

Variables that impact teachers' feelings about their workload include sense of belonging, level of emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Hughes (2012) posited that more teachers would remain in the profession if the teacher workload could be altered to reduce the number of tasks or if extra time could be provided during the school day to accomplish responsibilities. Time spent facilitating tutoring and remediation impact the workday of teachers.

Tutoring and Remediation

Students have various levels of academic needs. It is common for them to need academic support to reach learning goals (DeVries, 2014). Serving numerous students across multiple class preparations presents a challenge for teachers as they attempt to provide students with academic interventions in the form of tutoring and remediation (Certo & Fox, 2002; Kelley, 2004; Lasagna, 2009). Remediation requires teachers to focus on the learner errors that led to incorrect answers (Skelding-Dills, 2013). Once the errors are identified, a tutoring plan can be implemented to address the issues.

In 1987, a legislative mandate required the Texas Education Agency to institute tutoring interventions for all school districts to address dropouts (Wixson & Valencia, 2011). This was done to help schools meet the 95% graduation rate goals for the 1997-1998 school year. Response to Intervention (RTI) and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were funded at the federal level in 2004 (Searle, 2010). The goal of RTI was for teachers to provide remediation and support for students in math and reading before the students fall behind their peers (Searle, 2010). RTI has a three-tier system approach (Harlacher, Walker, & Sanford, 2010). The first tier of instructional support occurs in the classroom where students receive differentiated instruction and support. In the second tier, students receive additional time for tutoring and remediation in smaller groups of six to eight students. In the third tier, students receive the most support in smaller groups of four to six students. Individual and small-group instructional support is a time-intensive endeavor for teachers.

Teachers have expressed that lack of collaboration time and insufficient planning time are barriers for the effective implementation of RTI (Isbell & Szabo, 2014). This lack of time for collaboration and planning can feed into the frustration teachers experience as they attempt to implement remediation plans for their students. Learning communities can be facilitated to support the learning needs of teachers.

Learning Communities

Teachers need support with pedagogy and curriculum on a regular, systematic basis. Teachers can better meet the needs of students when they collaborate and work together to develop best practices for instruction (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). However, proper implementation of effective professional learning communities (PLCs) take time. An environment must be created where all teachers' voices are heard (Gideon, 2002).

Both the semester and the trimester schedules were designed with opportunities for PLCs. Through the implementation of PLCs, teachers experience a shift in mindset and habits for daily operations regarding tutoring and remediation (Vescio et al., 2008). PLCs have a positive effect on the culture of a school (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

School Culture

Faculty members working effectively toward improving student academic performance is part of a healthy school culture (Marzano, 2003). School leaders must study the culture of the school and plan with a purpose (Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011). It is the principal's responsibility to understand and address issues in a systemic manner for optimal success and for the retention of teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). Principals' campus intervention plans commonly include how to organize the school day, but often do not include the experiences of teachers. True understanding of the effectiveness of a school's systems comes from conversations with everyone involved in implementing the systems in question (Brucato, 2005). Teachers and students require a school culture that fosters collaboration and a school schedule that can provide a systematic solution to the problems of teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007).

Campus Schedules

The semester schedule is the most commonly-used secondary school schedule (Gandara, 2000; Patall, Cooper, & Allen, 2010). With the semester schedule, teachers generally teach seven or eight periods a day, while under the trimester schedule teachers teach five classes a day (Brower, 2000). Under the trimester schedule, there exists an option for weekly, 70-minute professional development periods. Staff members can use this time for collaboration and planning. The semester schedule is designed with two semesters and the trimester schedule is designed with three trimesters. The major difference between the trimester and semester schedules is the number of classes per day.

The amount of instructional time is the same under both the semester and the trimester schedules. To earn one credit, students must either take two semesters or two trimesters of a course. On the trimester schedule, students can generally earn 7.5 credits each school year. Over four school years, students can earn 30 credits. The goal for most Texas students is to earn 26 credits to graduate. The extra four credits of a trimester schedule can provide students with an opportunity to retake classes they have failed. Time for tutoring also can be built into the regular school day. In the current study, teachers experienced a change in the form of a shift in schedule.

Theoretical Framework

Lewin's change theory was used as the lens to examine the perceptions of the teachers who experienced a change of school schedule from semester to trimester. The theory consists of three parts: unfreeze, change or transition, and freeze. During the period of unfreeze, the organization must experience conditions that lead to the need for the organization to evolve (Burnes, 2004; Schein, 1996). The comfort level of the organization is stressed due to variables of change. Once the organization has experienced the stage of unfreeze, the system is ready for change.

The next evolution of the cycle requires the organization to change or adapt due to the conditions created during the unfreezing (Burnes, 2004; Schein, 1996). In the current study, the change experienced by the teachers was the shift from a semester to a trimester school schedule.

This shift occurred as a response to the stress put on the system that caused teachers to work collaboratively to ensure that students performed at higher levels. The stress in this case was the low academic performance of students on state and federal testing and the lack of adequate teacher preparation time. The final phase of Lewin's change theory requires the freezing of the organization in its new state of operation (Burnes, 2004). While the fluid nature of education requires constant change, the goal of freezing is for teachers to establish a formal routine and stability within the new systems implemented during the change or transition stage (Day & Leggat, 2015).

The campus at which the participants worked had a need to change. The school was underperforming on assessments compared to other campuses across the state and nation. The low performance of the school led to an unfreeze. Individuals were open to new ideas for school improvement due to the underperformance of the school. The freeze period of Lewin's change theory occurred after the school moved to a trimester schedule. During this time, the teachers were working within and adapting to the new schedule.

Research Design and Methodology

The qualitative tradition of phenomenology was used to explore teachers' experiences of change as they moved from working within a semester schedule to working within a trimester schedule. The areas of focus included campus culture, tutoring, and remediation of students. Transcendental phenomenology was used to study the meanings of the lived experience (Bernet, Welton, & Zavota, 2005).

Collection of Data

Data were collected via individual, face-to-face interviews with ten teachers and an associate principal. The participants were employed at a traditional high school in Texas. They had experience working with students who needed academic tutoring and remediation and had participated in professional development opportunities with colleagues during the change of schedule. The associate principal was responsible for curriculum and instruction for the campus and had knowledge of instructional, tutoring, and remediation challenges.

The teachers and associate principal were asked to share about their experience of changing from a semester to a trimester schedule, with a goal of gathering each participant's perceptions of the experience. Other questions for the teachers and associate principal centered on the topics of teacher collaboration and student remediation. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached (Creswell, 1998). Analytical memos were written after every third interview. Notes were made about areas in which previous experiences could play a role in the interpretation of the data.

Treatment of Data

There are three common stages for interpreting and reviewing data in phenomenological research: epoche, horizontalization, and imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is the process through which the researcher suspends or brackets prior preconceived feelings emotions or knowledge about the topic being researched. The researcher must understand the data as they are presented and process the information as new experiences. Using previous assumptions or presuppositions about the data can discredit the research (Finlay, 1999). In this study, personal experiences, biases, and preconceived notions about the research topic, including previous research

findings and theories, were set aside (Creswell, 1998). Each interview was transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 1998).

The transcribed interviews were reviewed, and inaccuracies were corrected (DeVault, 2016). The participants were asked to review their transcribed interviews and provide input if they felt that the transcriptions did not accurately capture their experiences (Giorgi, 2009). All of the participants expressed satisfaction with the transcripts.

Interviews were listened to repeatedly to help ensure deep understanding. Notes were taken based on the conversations from the recorded interviews. This phase required horizontalization of the data in search of significant statements (Giorgi, 2009). Horizontalization was continued as statements were combined to create an understanding of the themes present in the interview data (Creswell, 1998).

A point was made to remain receptive to each statement from each interviewee in order to facilitate the natural flow of the interview (Moustakas, 1994). Significant statements that provided clarity for the experiences of the participants were highlighted (Creswell, 1998). Similar significant statements were combined into common clusters of meanings. These clusters were used to support the writing of the structural description or the imaginative variation about the context and the setting of each participant's experiences. The process of coding the data was repeated multiple times, with each pass over the data resulting in the condensing of codes into themes (Creswell, 1998; Englander, 2012). The findings from each interview were compared repeatedly. The process was complete when it was believed that all combinations of themes from the information were understood (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analytical memos were used to help to understand the data from the interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The memos were a collection of findings as well as reflections and observations. These summaries of thoughts about the interviews were created throughout the process. The relevance of the memos was to ensure focus on the volume of data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves answering questions of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (DeVault, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness involves presenting substantive information about the fieldwork so that the reader can find familiarity in the research. Credibility is established after prolonged exposure and triangulation of the data, thus ensuring that a true representation of the data is reported. Triangulation occurs when different study participants are asked the same set of research questions (DeVault, 2016; Shenton, 2004).

Transferability involves being able to take the findings from the research and apply them to different situations (DeVault, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Confirmability requires the presentation of the research findings in their purest form, void of any personal reflections (DeVault, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Researcher bias about the topic was bracketed to help ensure that the research findings were based on the data collected (Creswell, 1998).

Reflexivity was practiced to support the process of data coding. Personal bias and preconceptions were reflected on throughout the study (Berger, 2015; Englander, 2012). Dialogue was held with colleagues about the stages of the research, potential bias, experiences, and past knowledge that could have led to untrustworthy results (Englander, 2012).

Findings

The participants ranged in age from 30-49. Six of the participants were 30-39 years old. The remaining five participants were 40-49 years old. All participants had bachelor's degrees, and four had earned master's degrees. Three other participants were pursuing a master's degree. One participant had a master's degree and was pursuing a doctoral degree. Seven participants identified their race as African American, and four identified their race as White. Seven participants were female and four were male. The participants had between 5-26 years of experience as an educator. Subjects taught by the teacher participants included math (4), social studies (2), career and technical education (2), science (1), and English (1). None of the teacher participants had previously experienced a trimester schedule as a student or as a teacher (see Table 1). Rita, the associate principal, had 26 years of experience in education. She had worked under both semester and A/B block schedules. Rita served as an associate principal during the transition from the semester to the trimester schedule and then back to the semester schedule.

Table 1
Teacher Participant Characteristics

Participant	Years of full-time teaching experience	Teaching subject	Schedule experienced as a student	Previous schedule experience as a teacher
Brenda	16	Social Students	Semester	Semester
Bridgette	5	CTE	Semester	Semester
Dwight	11	Math	Semester	Semester
Eddie	24	CTE	Semester	Semester, A/B Block
Janet	8	Science	Semester	Semester
Joe	12	Math	Semester	Semester
Pam	20	Math	A/B block	Semester
Rodney	25	Math	A/B Block	Semester
Sophia	24	English	Modified block	Semester
Tonya	18	Social Studies	Semester	Semester

Note. CTE is an acronym for Career and Technical Education.

Four themes emerged following a review of the interview data. The themes included: 1) teachers did not feel prepared for the pace of the trimester; 2) students who took ownership of their learning were academically successful on the trimester schedule; 3) trimester scheduling hindered relationship development with students; and 4) a strong sense of teacher collaboration existed under both the semester and the trimester schedules, but suffered when planning and training times were not shared (see Table 2). The themes were reinforced by the associate principal who was aware of the teachers' experiences. Representative quotes are included in the following sections to affirm each theme.

Table 2
Theme Representation by Participant

Participant	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
Brenda	X	X	X	X	X
Bridgette	X	X	X	X	X
Dwight	X	X		X	X
Eddie	X	X	X	X	X
Janet	X	X	X	X	X
Joe	X	X	X	X	X
Pam	X	X	X	X	X
Rita	X	X	X	X	X
Rodney	X	X	X	X	X
Sophia	X	X	X	X	X
Tonya	X	X	X	X	X

Note. This table shows the representation of each participant’s responses by theme.

Lack of Preparedness for Trimester Schedule

The first theme, teachers did not feel prepared for the pace of the trimester, was exemplified from the teachers’ repeated descriptions of how they felt teaching under a trimester schedule compared to teaching under a semester schedule. The semester schedule was designed to provide teachers with 50-minute classes over 18 weeks, which equaled 4,500 minutes of instruction. The trimester schedule was designed to provide teachers with 75-minute classes over 12 weeks, which also equaled 4,500 minutes of instruction (Brower, 2000; Geismar & Pultease, 1996). Lesson pacing was a strong concern for all of the teachers. While the two schedules offered the same instructional time, all of the participants reported feeling rushed to cover the required curriculum under the trimester schedule. The teachers expressed the need to plan their lessons differently under the trimester schedule so that they could ensure that they covered the required course material.

Bridgette said that pacing seemed rushed under the trimester schedule, which limited her ability to assess and reteach students properly. While Bridgette perceived that the longer class times under the trimester schedule allowed for additional hands-on, project-related activities, she said that she could not adequately cover the material with the students before the end of the trimester. Eddie shared that teachers had additional time to plan and implement activities while on the trimester schedule. However, he perceived that teachers were not prepared to “take advantage of the time offered.” Eddie appreciated the additional class time of the trimester schedule, but said that teachers needed additional support to plan effective lessons designed to capitalize on the schedule.

Professional development. Participants’ perceptions varied regarding the effectiveness of professional development aimed at preparing teachers to work within a trimester schedule. Some of the teachers thought that the time spent was effective, while others said they believed that the professional development missed the mark. Sophia was appreciative of the professional development designed to support time management. She said that the sessions held during back-to-school training were designed to cover multiple variables of the trimester schedule, but felt that the sessions did not adequately prepare the teachers.

Brenda said that she appreciated professional development opportunities aimed at helping teachers understand the concept of the trimester. While she valued the professional development that focused on lesson planning and understanding a trimester pacing calendar, Brenda said that she felt that the curriculum pacing was fast because the teachers had to cover more material during the 75-minute blocks of class. Brenda said that sometimes the teachers did not feel that students could master 75-minutes' worth of content, so they shortened the lessons and students fell behind. According to Brenda, staff development designed to address this issue was the most beneficial.

Some of the participants had positive experiences with professional development opportunities that were held during the common planning periods. Dwight felt that campus professional development "aligned" him with other teachers who were experiencing success. Rita, the associate principal, agreed that the ability to collaborate with teachers during professional development was beneficial. Janet viewed the professional development she received prior to the implementation of the trimester schedule as sufficient.

Bridgette said that the professional development designed to prepare teachers for the trimester schedule was not specific enough. She wanted to know before the start of school how to organize classroom instruction time down to the "specific minute." Bridgette said that she would have appreciated a model to follow. Eddie believed that the time built into the trimester for professional development was not sufficient to meet his training needs. He said that he did not have common planning time with other teachers who taught similar subjects.

Adjustments by teachers. The implementation of the trimester schedule created a need for teachers without trimester schedule experience to adjust to the variables of the schedule in order to utilize the additional 45-minutes of class time each day. The traditional 45-minute class periods no longer existed.

Pam shared that a major adjustment after switching to the new schedule was the need to update all of her lesson plans to 75-minute class periods. She said that a challenge she experienced after the change to the trimester schedule was "maximizing the time of instruction in the classroom." Dwight believed that switching to the trimester schedule was a challenge for several of his peers who struggled with time management and pacing issues. Janet said that under the semester schedule she had a better understanding of how much content her students could absorb. On the trimester schedule, Janet felt that her students reached a "saturation point." During the times when Janet felt her students were overwhelmed with the volume of work, she would slow her pace of instruction. However, because of the slower pace, Janet fell behind the district scope and sequence.

Joe said that when the campus was on the semester schedule, teachers could slowly roll out their content, then as the year progressed teachers would finish strong by having "bell-to-bell" instruction with no breaks. He felt that the trimester required teachers to start off teaching fast, which led to the creation of an environment in which teachers felt rushed. Pam said that the trimester schedule required covering almost twice as much material in a trimester class period than in a semester class period. After mastering the new pacing, Brenda said that she preferred the trimester over the semester schedule because the trimester schedule provided additional time for in-depth learning. She did not have to stop instruction in the middle of a learning activity, as she sometimes had to do under the semester schedule. According to the participants, students had to be self-motivated in order to take advantage of the opportunities available.

Ownership of Learning

The participants perceived that students who took ownership of their learning were academically successful on the trimester schedule. Eddie, Tonya, and Pam believed that if students were not focused and did not set goals for themselves, they would not make appropriate decisions and fulfill their full potential for academic success. Eddie believed that his purpose as a teacher was to prepare his students for college success with no excuses. He did not see a school schedule as an impediment to learning. Eddie said, “The students are capable of making decisions for their own learning, and the students who made positive decisions were successful on [both] the semester [and] the trimester schedule.” Dwight agreed with Eddie. Dwight said that he felt that high school students who are focused and “control” their education will be successful after high school. Pam said that she could determine the level of ownership for students’ learning based on their notetaking. She believed that students had to “adjust to the trimester schedule by taking better notes during the extended class time.”

Janet was concerned with motivating students to succeed, regardless of the campus schedule. She approached the trimester schedule as if she was teaching college courses. In Janet’s opinion, the faster pace forced students to become more mature and focused. She said that students who failed to mature fell behind, but added that she encouraged students who felt rushed while on the trimester schedule to take advantage of her tutoring hours. Tonya shared that the students who were focused on their own success made time to come to tutoring under both the semester and trimester schedules. She felt that student focus was dependent on motivation to succeed rather than on the campus schedule.

Opportunities for in-class remediation. All of the participants acknowledged opportunities within the trimester schedule for students to earn additional credits or receive remediation. The participants shared that while on the trimester schedule their students were able to receive remediation during the school day in the classes in which they struggled. Rita said that having students in need of remediation as a captive audience “did not leave to chance a student showing up for tutoring before or after school.”

Saturday school and after-school tutoring were implemented at the campus under both schedules. Bridgette felt that her students needed less after school and Saturday school remediation when the trimester schedule was in place. Sophia experienced the benefit of students being able to retake classes during their senior year while under the trimester schedule. She said that doing so helped many of her senior students obtain the credits they needed to graduate. While credit attainment was viewed as a positive aspect under the trimester schedule, the impact on relationships was not.

Trimester Schedule Hindered Relationships

Almost all of the teachers perceived that trimester scheduling hindered relationship development with students. The perception that the trimester schedule hindered relationships was shared by all of the teachers except for Dwight. Dwight said that he appreciated the ability to work with more students during the school year. The teachers shared that they did not feel that they had time to get to know students’ motivations while on the trimester schedule. The teachers considered the development of relationships critical in the determination of students’ academic success and expressed the need for students to get to know them and for them to get to know their students.

McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) and Murray and Zvoch (2011) posited that at-risk students do best when they feel there is a positive teacher-student relationship. The school at which the participants were employed had a large population of students who were considered at risk. Joe, Janet, and Sophia said that they felt that the trimester schedule was not conducive for the development of positive teacher-student relationships. While Sophia said that having students in class every day during the semester offered an opportunity for a better mentoring relationship with students, some students did not experience consistency of teachers.

It was not uncommon for students on the trimester schedule to have two different teachers for Parts A and B of a subject. Sophia said that the teachers did not like losing students in the middle of a course, which occurred when a course was split between the first and third trimesters. When that happened, Sophia said that the teachers lost ground in positive academic relationships they had developed with students. She said that benefits of the trimester schedule included students having access to their teachers after school and students being able to retake classes in which they struggled within the same year. Joe said that some students on the trimester schedule chose to attend the tutoring of a teacher they “liked” after the first trimester of a two-trimester course. Rita, the associate principal, said that she felt that other academic benefits of the trimester schedule such as opportunities to earn additional credits and the ability to monitor instruction between teachers far outweighed any of her concerns. Classroom management was an additional item of conversation between teachers.

Classroom management. Several teachers said they shared best practices for discipline with each other during the second and third trimesters under the trimester schedule. Dwight considered this sharing of information among teachers extremely valuable. It was important for him to hear about other teachers’ successes with students. Rita and Janet did not experience the same benefits. Rita perceived that teachers continually had to reestablish classroom norms and procedures while working under the trimester schedule. She said that reestablishing classroom procedures every new trimester with a new group of students made classroom management more difficult. Janet struggled to maintain her students’ attention spans over 75-minute trimester class periods.

While the trimester schedule did not ease classroom management issues, there were some opportunities of the schedule design that many of the teacher participants (Bridgette, Dwight, Janet, Joe, Pam, Sophia, and Tonya) believed made a positive difference. Sophia expressed the benefit of not having a challenging class of students for 18 weeks, the length of courses under the semester schedule. She preferred 12 weeks, the length of the trimester schedule courses.

Bridgette divided the impact of the experience of changing from a semester to a trimester schedule into positive and negative experiences. She said that the “ability of students to switch to new classes more frequently to avoid restless behavior and classroom management issues” was a benefit of the trimester schedule. However, Bridgette shared, “having challenging students switch classes took away the opportunity to build a positive relationship.”

Strong Sense of Collaboration

A strong sense of teacher collaboration existed under both the semester and the trimester schedules, but suffered when planning times were not shared. The participants perceived that if the teachers did not have common planning times, collaboration suffered. When the teachers did not have common planning periods, they had to meet before or after school, making collaboration more difficult.

The teachers said that they valued opportunities to share ideas and work together for the benefit of students. Tonya recalled a “strong sense of collaboration among the teachers before the

trimester was implemented, after the implementation, and after the switch back to the semester schedule.” Eddie did not have built-in time for collaboration with his peers, but believed there was a need for it. Strong teacher collaboration is necessary for leaders to facilitate the turning of schools into effective, efficient learning organizations (Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015).

As the teachers’ conversations evolved while working within the trimester schedule, they shared best practices for student success. During the second and third trimesters, the teachers discussed the students they had in common. Rita felt that their familiarity with students from the previous trimester allowed the teachers to discuss topics such as students’ needs and academic strengths. They also had conversations about best practices for student motivation. She believed that this level of collaboration under the trimester schedule was different due to the teachers’ familiarity with additional students.

All of the core teachers acknowledged efforts made in the school before the implementation of the trimester schedule to ensure that teachers worked together to find best practices for educating students. Rita acknowledged that intentional efforts to ensure professional learning communities and academic cluster periods were a part of the school culture. Janet said that the science teachers intentionally worked as a team, so the transition to the trimester schedule was “as comfortable as possible” for teachers and students. Sophia shared that she felt that the teachers in her social studies department naturally collaborated on various projects; however, while on the trimester schedule, there was “deepened collaboration.” Sophia attributed this to the longer periods available for coaches to meet. In addition, Brenda felt that the trimester schedule promoted a culture of collaboration as the teachers worked together to develop creative activities to adjust to the pace of the schedule. She said that teachers better utilized professional learning communities and cluster planning times to develop lessons.

For Tonya, collaboration among the teachers remained the same after changing from a semester schedule to a trimester schedule and back again. She was complimentary of her fellow teachers and the efforts they put into planning and working as a team. Likewise, Rodney said that his teacher colleagues always had strong collaborative relationships. Teachers in his department sought ways to support each other with challenging students. During planning and collaboration time, Janet said that she experienced the same frustrations as other teachers who had the same level of experience as she had. However, she shared, “Teachers who had more experience, especially those who worked under different schedules like the A/B block schedule, were able to adapt to the trimester schedule’s 75-minute classes.”

While the core subject teachers enjoyed common planning periods and collaboration, the elective teachers said that they did not experience the same benefits. Because Eddie did not have a common planning time, he had to meet with colleagues before or after school. Dwight and Bridgette agreed that “collaboration was a school norm and expected,” however, because they did not have a common planning period, they had to work harder to see it materialize. Bridgette considered the lack of common planning time a serious concern. Instead of meeting to discuss the needs of individual students, planning time conversations centered on how to keep up the pace so that instruction would not fall behind.

Rita agreed that the lack of common planning time for the elective teachers was a concern of the administrators. She said that the administrators had a goal of building a trimester schedule that would include common planning time for the elective teachers. Due to the logistics of building the schedule, this did not happen. Rita said that the first and second year of building the master schedule for the trimester offered new learning opportunities. The goal for the third year was to do

a better job of supporting the elective teachers with common planning periods, however the schedule was changed back to a semester schedule before the third year of implementation.

Conclusions

The participants experienced the stages of unfreeze, change, and freeze at their campus. Due to the overall performance of the students on state assessments, the school leaders unfroze and rethought their practices. The intervention response of the school leaders was to change from a semester schedule to a trimester schedule. The school then had a refreeze and remained on the trimester schedule for two years before transitioning back to the semester schedule.

Critics of Kurt Lewin's organizational change theory cite its reliance on top-down leadership for decision making (Burnes, 2004; Schein, 1996). The participants in this study did not take issue with the top-down leadership approach, however additional conversations between school leaders and teachers may have impacted the concerns of teachers as they experienced the schedule change.

The participants agreed that true opportunities for success were not dependent on the trimester schedule, but rather the maturity of the student. They believed that each student had to place individual value on his or her education, personal goals, study habits, and time management. While the teachers sought positive relationships with their students, some of the participants perceived that the positive relationships were lost during the change to the trimester schedule. The amount of time teachers had with students was the same under both schedules, however the participants felt rushed to cover material under the trimester schedule. These concerns revealed an opportunity to revisit lesson planning and curriculum design for teachers on alternate schedules.

A strong professional development plan is critical to ensuring the systemic growth and productivity of effective school instructional practices (Keigher, 2010; Lasagna, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Many teachers prefer to work in schools where there is a strong sense of professional collaboration (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). The core subject teacher participants believed that the school had a strong culture for professional development and felt that this culture for professional development continued after the change to the trimester schedule. However, the elective teachers did not experience the same level of professional development support for the implementation of the trimester schedule.

A goal for this research was to bring the voice of teachers to the conversation about school improvement, specifically in the conversation of changing school schedules. The inclusion of teachers in decision making with administrators can result in a better school climate and improved student achievement (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). While the data indicated that a difference existed between the experiences of the core teachers and the elective teachers regarding professional development, the participants had similar perceptions of student remediation and teacher collaboration.

Recommendations for Future Research

The implementation of organizational change theory is critical for school leaders who seek continuous improvement for their organizations (Hussain, Lei, Akram, Haider, & Ali, 2016). The data from the interviews indicated that the participants experienced the stages of unfreeze, change, and freeze when the school changed to the trimester schedule. The participants perceived that student performance on state assessments was a driving factor in the administrative unfreeze of the school schedule leading to the change. Further research could be conducted to identify variables

other from student performance that educators consider before making a decision to pursue alternate schedules.

The participants perceived a lack of time for relationship building with students when on the trimester schedule. Additional research could be conducted to determine if this feeling was also held by the students. Researchers could address the variables that comprise a healthy teacher-student relationship and how are those variables impact students and teachers on semester and trimester schedules. In addition, research should be conducted to address the difference of experiences had by core and elective teachers during the transition of schedules from the semester schedule to the trimester and back again. Researchers could also focus on how administrators define the variables they consider prior to making a change designed to improve student performance.

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