

Charleston Teacher Alliance

2008-2009 Survey of School Opening Procedures in the Charleston County School District

Fast Facts

- Survey was developed and reviewed by CTA leadership.
- Survey was conducted between August 27th and September 24, 2008.
- 627 CTA members completed the survey.
- This is the fourth annual survey of school opening procedures.

Analysis Overview

The overall outcome of the CTA's first survey of the year suggests that teachers were mostly satisfied with professional development (PD) this year. 86% of teachers surveyed believed that the individuals presenting PD were well prepared and organized. 71% of teachers surveyed thought the PD was focused on specific strategies to help students.

Positive survey data on unencumbered workdays dropped 7% from last year. Only 69% of teachers surveyed reported having unencumbered workdays to focus on their classrooms. About the same percentage of teachers surveyed (70%) were satisfied with the way their schools organized workdays. Several teacher comments suggested having teacher workdays prior to professional development. When teachers were asked if two days were adequate time to prepare the classroom only 45% of teachers agreed. Based on teachers' feedback within the survey, many primary grade teachers reported needing more time while upper grade teachers found two days to be adequate.

A majority of teachers surveyed (75%) received communication from their school over the summer, and 87% reported receiving no pressure to attend summer training outside of the 190-day teacher contract. Despite the lack of pressure to work extra hours, about one third of the teachers surveyed donated over 40 hours of their summer break preparing for this school year. 80% of teachers surveyed donated at least 11 hours to preparing during their summer break. 44% of the teachers surveyed would like school to start on Wednesday, 27% preferred Thursday, and Tuesday came in third with 17% of the votes.

Improvements Have Been Made

In the past teacher workdays were not defined as being days for teachers to work undisturbed in their classrooms. Meetings, training, and other events would occur on these days with limited or no warning. All PD was run by the district instead of the local schools. This made it very difficult to create relevant training because the district's schools are very diverse. CTA surveys of the past showed that a majority of the teachers were unsatisfied with beginning of the year workdays and PD. Especially unpopular was the pep-rally held at the North Charleston Coliseum. CTA data indicated that most teachers considered this event to be a waste of time.

The district's leadership is due credit for listening to teacher concerns and reshaping the beginning of the school year to meet teachers' needs. However, they need to continue to seek teacher feedback. Only 61% of teachers responded that they had an opportunity to provide feedback after PD. This is a 12% decrease from last year. The majority of the data gathered from this survey indicates that PD and teacher workdays were successful and efficient this year.

Unfortunately, based on the data and teacher comments, there are still some school leaders that are not honoring teacher workdays and/or are pressuring teachers to work outside of their legally signed contract of 190 days. District leadership has specifically stated that workdays are to be unencumbered. Any school not honoring this request is in defiance of district leadership. State contracts require teachers to work for 190 days. Any attempt to coerce teachers into believing that they must work beyond this contract, with or without pay, is unethical and illegal.

CTA Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on survey results and teacher feedback.

1. The first day for students to return to school should be changed to Wednesday.
2. One of the PD days at the beginning of the year should be changed to a workday so there are three workdays at the beginning of the year.
3. Teachers should have at least one full workday before any PD.
4. First year teachers and teachers who are required to change/move classrooms should receive an optional, extra workday (paid) to move materials into the new room.
5. New student orientations should be held during the districts PD day not during the teachers' workdays.
6. The Office of Exceptional Children PD at Charleston Southern needs to be revamped to better meet the needs of teachers. The CCSD needs to gather feedback from teachers who attended this meeting in order to improve the PD's usefulness.
7. All teachers should receive written communication from their administrators before school starts explaining the agenda for opening procedures.
8. District leadership needs to compose a district-wide email clearly defining teacher workdays as unencumbered time for teachers to work in their classrooms without meetings, trainings, or other interruptions. This email should be sent to all teachers as well as administrators. This email should include a phone number/email address for teachers to anonymously report infractions of this policy.
9. District leadership needs to clearly state that all meetings, planning time, classes, and training outside of the 190 days of a teaching contract are voluntary (with the exception of NTO). Teacher should be given a written document with an explanation of what compensation they will receive and when they will receive it if they choose to participate in an event outside of the 190 contract. A phone number/email address should also be made available to anonymously report infractions.