

Flexible Learning Year Schools Report Perception Survey Results October 2010

In May 2010, the 25 school districts that comprise the Flexible Learning Year (FLY) Improving Student Achievement Initiative conducted a survey of teachers, students and the community about the three-year initiative. The survey (over 3,000 completed surveys), conducted by the SMSU Marketing Advisory Center, had a fairly even distribution of respondents from three groups: students (40% of total respondents), teachers/staff (27% of total respondents) and parents (33% of total respondents). This survey of the FLY Improving Student Achievement Initiative is the first year of a four-year longitudinal study. The overall goal of the study is to determine shifts in attitudes and perceptions pertaining to the new academic schedule and the perceived value from stakeholders regarding the collaborative efforts of the 25 school districts involved. Moreover, the specific goal of this first annual analysis was to better determine the attitudes and perceptions of students, faculty/staff, and parents before the start of the 2010/2011 school year regarding the implementation of this new initiative and what effects they foresee from changing the start and stop dates for the academic year of the consortium school districts.

The key findings resulting from this study indicate that respondents need more information about the new Flexible Learning Year (FLY) Improving Student Achievement Initiative and the 25 school district consortium. Other findings appear to support the view that respondents do not have strong opinions on whether the initiative will result in improved educational outcomes or improved test scores. By better informing the general public on the objectives of adopting this new initiative and shared collaboration within the 25 school districts, the participating consortium school districts should improve response rates and strengthen opinions of stakeholders in subsequent survey periods.

Recommendations

The SMSU Marketing Advisory Center (SMAC) provided the FLY Consortium School Districts with recommendations as a result of this survey. Community education and information was the initial recommendation for the FLY school districts. SMAC suggested that providing more public information stressing benefits of the consortium, supplying information to media with interim results as they occur from the new schedule, publicizing the results of the current survey and informing various publics concerning subsequent annual surveys and their results would address concerns and questions raised through the initial survey results.

Conclusions

The researchers concluded several things as a result of the survey. First, parents and teachers had a significantly higher opinion that the consortium will provide more leverage with the state legislature than students; students do not understand the role of state legislature in education. Largely, though, the majority of respondents have no opinion regarding the consortium, its purpose, the overall benefits nor the lobbying potential.

Second, although many respondents had no opinion on the flexible-learning year, students had significantly stronger feelings indicating that the flexible-learning year will: 1) Create a less stressful winter Holiday break, 2) Provide a brighter future for students, 3) Increase students' comfort with testing, 4) Positively impact summer jobs and 5) Decrease focus in the classroom. Students identified that not having homework and projects over breaks and having school release shortly after the completion of state tests will be advantages of the new flexible-learning year.

Two out of three respondents feel that the flexible-learning year will impact extracurricular activities; most feel that impact will be negative. Twenty-nine percent of respondents participate in the State Fair on an annual basis. Of that 29 percent, 51 percent go based on family tradition. Additional information on the survey results can be obtained by contacting your school district superintendent.