



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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January 4, 2021

The Honorable Janet D. Howell
Chair, Senate Finance and
Appropriations Committee
Virginia General Assembly
P.O. Box 2608
Reston, VA 20195-0608

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Virginia General Assembly
4222 Fortuna Plaza, Suite 659
Dumfries, Virginia 22025

Dear Madam and Sir:

I am pleased to submit the enclosed report on the prevailing practice of planning time for elementary teachers, as required by *Item 143.H, Chapter 1283, 2020 Acts of Assembly*. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) surveyed school division personnel and a convenience sample of elementary school teachers to inform this study. The enclosed report summarizes findings on planning time for elementary teachers for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

If you require additional information, please contact Michael Bolling, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Learning and Innovation, at (804) 225-2034 or michael.bolling@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Lane".

James F. Lane

JFL/JPR
Enclosure

c: The Honorable Atif Qarni
Secretary of Education



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Report

Prevailing Practice of Planning Time for Elementary Teachers

Presented to:

House Appropriations Committee

**Senate Finance and Appropriations
Committee**

January 4, 2021

Virginia Department of Education

P. O. Box 2120

Richmond, Virginia 23218-2120

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AUTHORITY FOR THE STUDY

Item 143 in *Chapter 1289* of the *2020 Appropriation Act* requires the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to develop and administer a one-time collection of data from school divisions to determine the prevailing practice of planning time for elementary school teachers. See Appendix A for language from the 2020 Appropriation Act.

STUDY OVERVIEW

For elementary teachers, planning time is typically structured as blocks of time during the school day where they can plan and prepare for their classes, meet with students, or grade assignments. Section 22.1-291.1 of the *Code of Virginia* requires local school boards to ensure that all elementary teachers are provided at least an average of 30 minutes per day during the students' school week as planning time. This equates to at least 2.5 hours of scheduled planning time per instructional week.¹

Nationally, the average planning time for elementary teachers within the 124 largest school districts in the United States is higher than Virginia's statutory requirements, with an average of 45 minutes of planning time per day.² Increasingly, research also supports the use of common or collaborative planning time, where teams of teachers work together to learn from one another and collaborate on projects.^{3,4} Very few school districts across the United States specifically require time for collaboration.¹ The *Code of Virginia* also does not currently include any requirements for collaborative planning time.

The purpose of this study was to determine the prevailing practice of elementary teacher planning time within Virginia school divisions. The VDOE collected two sources of data to inform this study: (1) reports from Virginia school divisions on common planning time practices for elementary teachers; and (2) survey data from elementary teachers on their experiences with planning time.

¹ Though not addressed through this study, Virginia requires secondary school teachers to receive 45 minutes per day for a planning period. See § 22.1-253.13:2, 8VAC20-131-5, 8VAC20-131-240.

² National Council on Teacher Quality. (2017). *Teacher Planning and Collaboration Time*. Accessed from: <https://www.nctq.org/blog/November-2017:-Teacher-Planning-and-Collaboration-Time>.

³ Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Dallas, TX. National Staff Development Council.

⁴ Mertens, S. B., Flowers, N., Anfara Jr., V. A., & Caskey, M. M. (2010). Common Planning Time. *Middle School Journal*, 41(5), 50-57.

DATA COLLECTION

Division Survey

In October 2020, VDOE staff administered a survey to representatives from each of Virginia’s 132 school divisions to determine the prevailing practice for elementary teacher planning time. The survey requested information from each school division on how elementary teacher planning time was structured in 2019-2020, prior to state-wide COVID-19 school closures, and in 2020-2021, as school divisions continue to adjust instructional models in response to the pandemic. Elementary teachers include grade level/classroom teachers, elementary specialists (for example, reading specialists or special education specialists), and elementary resource teachers (for example, art teachers, music teachers, or librarians). Elementary teachers could include school counselors, depending on how they are resourced locally, so data were collected on school counselor planning time for this study as well.

VDOE received responses from 129 of 132 school divisions for this report. It is important to note that while VDOE requested information on school divisions’ prevailing practices, most divisions (94 percent) reported that the principal or assistant principal at each school was responsible for scheduling planning time for elementary teachers. This study, therefore, may not capture the wide variability in planning time schedules that likely exist within schools in the same division.

Teacher Survey

In October 2020, VDOE staff also administered a survey to a convenience sample of Virginia elementary school teachers to ascertain their individual perceptions of scheduled planning time for the 2019-2020 and the 2020-2021 school years. VDOE staff promoted the survey through TeacherDirect, a weekly VDOE newsletter for Virginia teachers and other instructional staff who are interested in receiving information on instructional resources, professional development, and grant opportunities. VDOE received 7,143 responses to the survey.⁵ Sixty-three percent of respondents identified as grade level/classroom teachers, 22 percent identified as specialists, and 10 percent identified as resource teachers. The remaining five percent identified as other, and most often identified themselves as school counselors, school or division administrators, or special education teachers and specialists (see Table 1).

⁵ In 2019, there were 48,924 teachers teaching in elementary and combined schools (including elementary grades) in Virginia.

Table 1. Teacher Survey Respondents by Type of Teaching Assignment

Teaching Assignment	Respondent Count	Respondent Percent
Grade Level/Classroom Teacher*	4,533	63%
<i>Grade Level/Classroom Teacher by Grade Level Reported**</i>		
• Pre-Kindergarten	191	4%
• Kindergarten	622	14%
• First Grade	703	16%
• Second Grade	739	16%
• Third Grade	734	16%
• Fourth Grade	751	17%
• Fifth Grade	757	17%
• Sixth Grade	150	3%
• Other	37	1%
Specialist	1,581	22%
Resource Teacher	701	10%
Other (including school counselor)	328	5%
Total	7,143	100%

*Unduplicated count of responding grade level/classroom teachers

**Counts by grade level exceed total grade level/classroom teachers responding because teachers could select more than one grade level for their current teaching assignment. For example, a teacher who reported teaching third grade and fourth grade students is counted in both grade levels.

Capturing elementary teachers' personal experiences with scheduled planning time provides important context to the division-level survey results. However, teachers who chose to complete the survey may differ from all other teachers in the Commonwealth in important but unknown ways. As such, the results of the teacher survey should be interpreted with caution as the results may not reflect the experiences of all teachers in Virginia.

FINDINGS

Amount of Planning Time Scheduled per Week

The *Code of Virginia* requires 2.5 hours per week (an average of 30 minutes per day) of scheduled planning time for elementary teachers. For the 2019-2020 school year, nearly all responding school divisions reported that elementary teachers received at least 2.5 hours of scheduled planning time per week, with greater than 30 percent of divisions reporting 3.5 hours or more of scheduled planning time per week for each elementary teacher assignment (see Table 2). For the 2020-2021 school year, the percent of divisions reporting more than 3.5 hours of scheduled planning time for elementary teachers grew substantially to greater than 65 percent of divisions across each teacher assignment type.

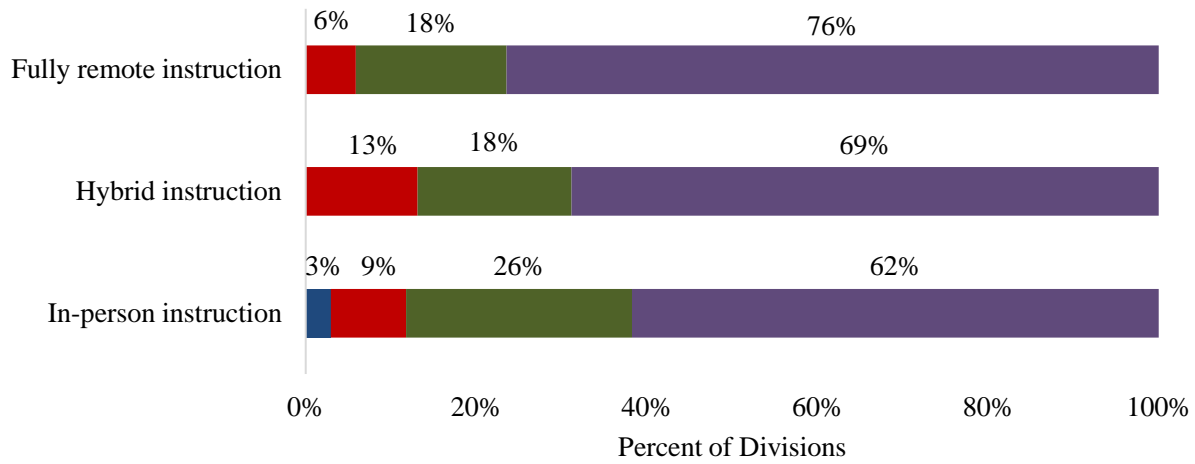
Table 2. Average Scheduled Planning Time per Week by Type of Elementary Teacher Assignment

Assignment Type	2019-2020 School Year				2020-2021 School Year			
	Percent of Divisions				Percent of Divisions			
	<i>Less than 2.5 hours</i>	<i>2.5 hours</i>	<i>More than 2.5 hours but less than 3.5 hours</i>	<i>3.5 hours or more</i>	<i>Less than 2.5 hours</i>	<i>2.5 hours</i>	<i>More than 2.5 hours but less than 3.5 hours</i>	<i>3.5 hours or more</i>
Grade level/classroom teacher	1%	9%	50%	40%	1%	10%	20%	69%
Specialist	2%	10%	48%	40%	2%	11%	22%	66%
Resource teacher	0%	12%	52%	36%	1%	11%	19%	70%
School counselor	5%	10%	53%	32%	3%	8%	23%	66%

Compared to division reports, teachers responded to VDOE’s survey reported fewer hours of scheduled planning time. For the 2019-2020 school year, 30 percent of grade level/classroom teachers, 41 percent of specialists, 25 percent of resource teachers, and 45 percent of school counselors reported receiving less than 2.5 hours of planning time. Division and teacher results do align, however, on the trend of increased planning time for the 2020-2021 school year. Compared to 2019-2020, an additional three percent of grade level/classroom teachers, seven percent of specialists, four percent of resource teachers, and nine percent of counselors reported 2.5 or more hours of scheduled planning time in 2020-2021. Even with this increase, survey results indicate that 67 percent of teachers were dissatisfied with the amount of planning time they received in 2020-2021.

The increase in reported planning time between the 2019-2020 school year and the 2020-2021 school year may in part be dependent upon the type of instructional approach school divisions adopted for elementary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. VDOE staff compared divisions’ November 2020 operational status (fully remote instruction, hybrid instruction, or in-person instruction) for elementary schools with divisions’ planning time reports, and found that divisions offering fully remote instruction for elementary schools reported greater amounts of teacher planning time than divisions offering in-person instruction or hybrid instruction (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Hours of Scheduled Planning Time for Elementary Teachers by Division-wide Operational Status for Elementary Schools**



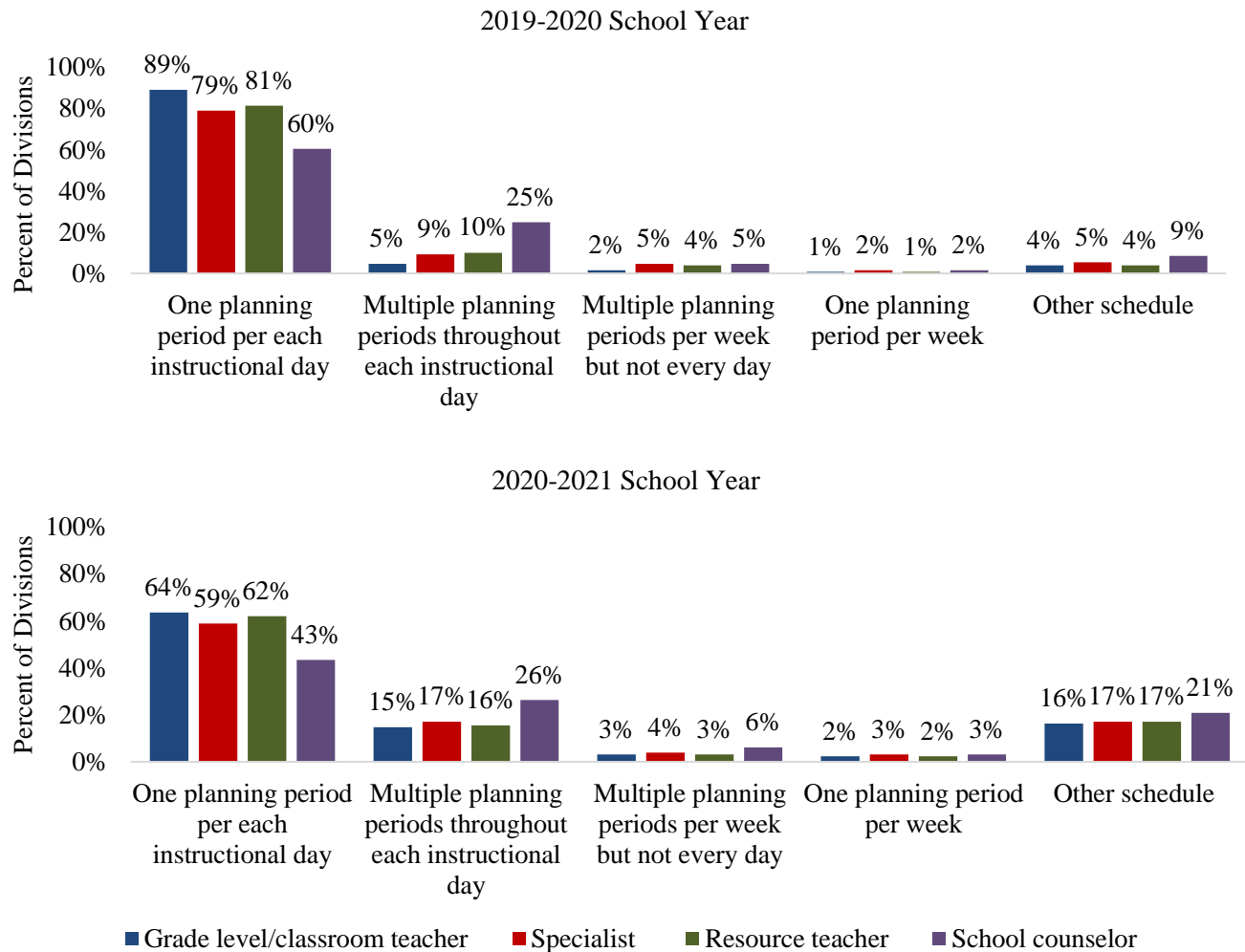
■ Less than 2.5 hours ■ 2.5 hours ■ More than 2.5 but less than 3.5 hours ■ 3.5 hours or more

**Fully remote instruction indicates learning is remote for the vast majority of students. Hybrid instruction includes multiple schedules where some students are remote and some students are in person. In-person instruction indicates four or more days of in-person instruction for all students.*

Frequency of Planning Time Schedules

VDOE also asked school divisions and teachers to identify the most common schedule for elementary teacher planning time. For 2019-2020, school divisions indicated that the most common method for scheduling planning time for each teacher assignment type was to offer one planning period per instructional day (see Figure 2). Offering one planning period per day was also the most commonly reported schedule in 2020-2021, although divisions selected this schedule less frequently than for the 2019-2020 school year, and were more likely to choose the “other” response option for 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020. An analysis of divisions’ submitted descriptions of other planning time schedules for 2020-2021 indicate that most are providing teachers short planning periods four times per week and one extended, day-long planning period during asynchronous remote instruction.

Figure 2. Frequency of Planning Time Schedules by Elementary Teacher Assignment

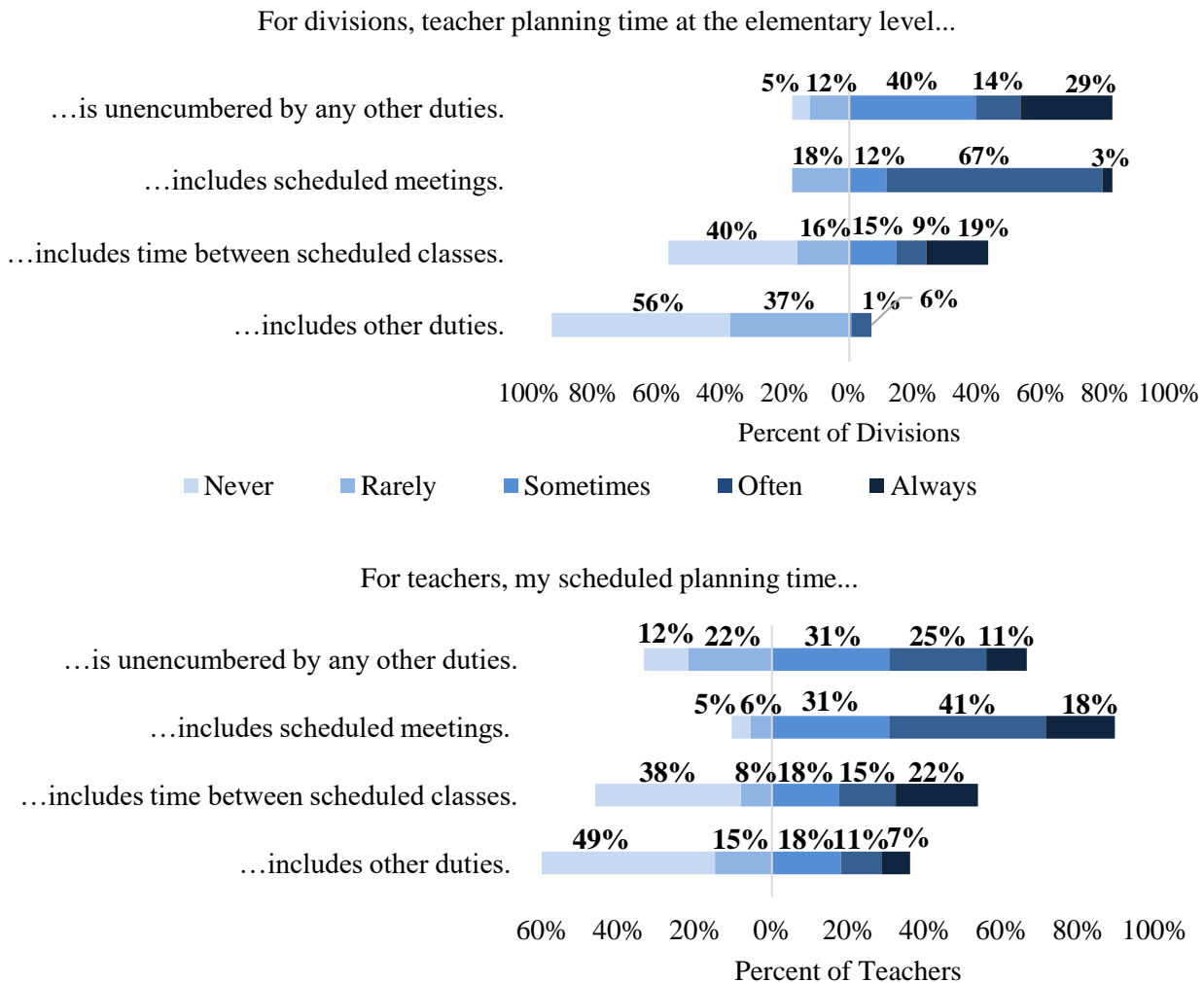


Teachers’ responses to questions about their planning time schedules generally align with reports from school divisions. In 2019-2020, 67 percent of grade level/classroom teachers, 55 percent of specialists, and 61 percent of resource teachers indicated that they received one planning period per instructional day. Similar to division reports, the percent of teachers receiving one planning period per day dropped slightly for the 2020-2021 school year, with more teachers choosing the “other” response option. This pattern was consistent for all teacher assignment types but school counselors who were most likely to choose the “other” schedule option for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school year (36 percent and 32 percent, respectively). In survey comments, many counselors indicated that they set their own schedules, and find time for planning during any “down time” between addressing student needs. Overall, just under half of teachers responding (45 percent) reported being satisfied with how their planning time is being scheduled in 2020-2021.

Duties during Scheduled Planning Time

Divisions' reports and teacher survey responses concur that scheduled planning time is often or always unencumbered by other duties (see Figure 3). However, 70 percent of divisions and 60 percent of teachers responded that scheduled planning time often or always includes meetings, such as meeting with specialists or IEP meetings. The results are nearly split on whether scheduled planning time is inclusive of time between classes, with 56 percent of divisions and 46 percent of teachers reporting this never or rarely occurs. Both divisions and teachers were least likely to report that scheduled planning time includes other duties such as monitoring hallways, buses, or the cafeteria during meals. Responses to this survey item may reflect the fact that fewer students were in school buildings due to COVID-19 at the time of the survey.

Figure 3. Division and Teacher Responses to Duties during Scheduled Planning Time



SUMMARY

The purpose of this report was to determine the prevailing practice of elementary teacher planning time within Virginia school divisions. Most school divisions report meeting the *Code of Virginia* requirement of an average of 30 minutes per day (2.5 hours per week) of scheduled planning time, with more than 30 percent of divisions in 2019-2020 and 60 percent of divisions in 2020-2021 reporting 3.5 hours or more planning time per week. Results from the a convenience sample of Virginia teachers indicates far less compliance, however, with 30 percent of grade level/classroom teachers reporting less than 2.5 hours of planning time per week in 2019-2020. Teachers did report an increase in planning time for 2020-2021, with school divisions offering fully remote instruction being more likely to endorse 3.5 hours or more of planning time per week.

Division and teacher survey results concur that, most commonly, scheduled planning time is offered through one planning period per instructional day. With instructional shifts in response to COVID-19, divisions and teachers were slightly less likely to report this type of schedule for 2020-2021; many divisions indicated in survey comments that they received short periods of planning time four days per week and one longer planning period during asynchronous instructional days. Even through some teachers experienced increased planning time in 2020-2021, 67 percent remain unsatisfied with the amount of planning time they receive and 55 percent reported dissatisfaction with their planning time schedule. This dissatisfaction may stem from how planning time is used, with nearly 60 percent of teachers and 70 percent of divisions indicating planning time often or always includes meetings.

APPENDIX A

Item 143.H, Chapter 1289, 2020 Acts of Assembly:

H. The Department of Education shall develop and administer a one-time collection of data from school divisions to determine the prevailing practice of planning time for elementary school teachers. The Department shall compile and report the information to the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees no later than the beginning of the 2021 General Assembly session.