

DATE: November 29, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: West 8 Project Exploring Half-Day Meetings to Provide Time for Professional Learning (Response to Trustee Request #110)

ORIGINATOR: Mark Liguori, Ron MacNeil, Superintendents for Schools

RESOURCE STAFF: West 8 Principal Support Group (Sharon Blackwell, Bob Carter, Will Deys, Dave Kowalchuk, Terry MacPherson, Elizabeth Norris-Kartz, Geoff Sader, Judy Towes)

REFERENCE: June 21, 2011 Conference Meeting (Trustee Johnner)

ISSUE

The following information was requested:

Provide information on the West 8 Project exploring half-day meetings on early dismissal Thursdays to provide time for professional learning. Is it a value for staff professional development? Is there a savings to the school and district for professional development in this manner?

BACKGROUND

See enclosed report, *Review of the Early Dismissal Pilot of the W8 Schools* (Appendix I).

CURRENT SITUATION

The early dismissal at the eight schools has continued with the purpose that this time be used for staff collaboration.

KEY POINTS

- An evaluation of the project was undertaken in February of 2010. Data collected was related to:
 - Current level of support by parents, students and staff,
 - Examination of the planned activities and the relative success of achieving the initial plans,
 - Identification of unanticipated outcomes,
 - Identification of evidence of improved instructional practice,
 - Other data as identified by the schools and the evaluation team.
- Project cost was not an identified measure.
- Generally speaking, there is overall support from each stakeholder group for the pilot project and that positive outcomes are resulting from this.

- As a result of the W-8 early Thursday dismissal, additional transportation costs incurred during the 2011-2012 school year will be approximately \$75,000. In general, the ability to leverage routes minimizes costs. While Student Transportation fully supports programming initiatives and partnership opportunities similar to the W-8 project, situations that isolate a small group of schools (such as an early dismissal to the W-8 grouping) eliminate a number of opportunities for efficiencies within a broader geographic area and, consequently, increases costs. The cost is based on current ridership and carrier contracts.

APPENDIX I Review of the Early Dismissal Pilot of the W8 Schools Report

ML:ljb

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 5, 2010

TO: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Review of the Early Dismissal Pilot of the W8 Schools

RESOURCE

STAFF: Trish Clare, Bruce Cline, Rick Gingras, Leona Gordey, Carolyn Mathew, Kathy McCabe, Greg McNulty, Anthony Walsh, Colin Woelfle, Corrie Ziegler

INFORMATION

In the spring of 2009, a group of eight principals from schools in the west end of Edmonton submitted a proposal to the Superintendent to dismiss students early on Thursday afternoons (11:54 – 12:30 p.m.), for the purpose of engaging staff in “staff collaboration activities” (Appendix II). This request was approved by the Superintendent, with an expectation that progress of the pilot’s work be evaluated.

In November, 2009, the Superintendent requested that by February 15, 2010, an evaluation of the successes and challenges of the W8 pilot project be completed. The evaluation should include data related to the following:

- Current level of support by parents, students and staff
- Examination of the anticipated (planned) activities and the relative success of achieving the initial plans (output measure)
- Identification of unanticipated outcomes (positive and negative)
- Identification of evidence of improved instructional practice (and by association, student engagement), as a result of the extensive professional learning provided
- Other data as identified by the schools and the evaluation team

An evaluation team was struck, consisting of the staff listed above (see “Resource Staff”). The work of this team was coordinated by Corrie Ziegler, Director of Teaching and Learning Support Services. The evaluation team utilized the following measurement tools to gather data from stakeholders:

- All eight principals were involved in focus group conversation
- Teachers and Educational Assistants responded to a survey and groups of teachers from each of the eight schools participated in focus group conversations
- Consultants working with the W8 schools were surveyed
- Support Staff participated in focus group conversations
- Three Custodians took part in a focus group conversation
- Five hundred and four parents from all eight schools responded to a paper survey
- Students from three of the eight schools engaged in focus group conversations
- Student Transportation data was gathered by interviewing the decision unit manager.

- Confirmation of Instructional Minutes was completed by Student Information. (by reviewing the timetables at each of the eight schools)

The data collected is based on 4.5 months of pilot project implementation within the eight schools (September, 2009 to mid January, 2010). Principals and teachers indicated that it was difficult to provide concrete data at this early stage of implementation.

This report provides a summary of the information collected through the above measurement tools. Preliminary themes and trends are identified. Supporting documentation is contained in the Appendices that follow.

CZ:gj

APPENDIX I – Summary of Evaluation

APPENDIX II – Copy of e-mail Containing the Initial Proposal

APPENDIX III – Responses from W8 Parent Survey

APPENDIX IV – Responses from W8 Student Focus Group

APPENDIX V – Responses from Survey of Consultants working with W8 Schools

SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Staff members from each of the eight schools (principals, teachers and educational assistants) were involved in the following collaborative sessions each month:

- First Thursday of month – Business Meeting in own school
- Second Thursday of month – Network Groups (cross school groupings)
- Third Thursday of month – Professional Learning (choice of 25 professional learning sessions)
- Fourth Thursday of month – “Flex” for school based agenda (e.g., lead teacher groups, Balanced Literacy, divisional meetings, Tribes training)

Generally speaking, there is overall support from each stakeholder group for the pilot project, and that the project is resulting in positive outcomes for staff and students. Each group also indicated a need to fine tune and adjust in some areas of the project implementation plan.

Principals indicated the strongest level of support for the pilot project. Based on their observations during class visits, dialogue with staff groups and individual teachers, as well as an examination of school budgets and attendance data, there is a strong, consistent response among all eight principals related to the positive impact of this pilot on staff and students (Appendix III). Some highlights shared by this group include:

- Cost savings (decreased substitute teacher costs, shared costs for consultants, reduced medical appointments, etc.)
- Access to a large group of consultants for each teacher (19 consultants), which would not be possible if each school were to access this support alone
- Increased collaborative opportunities for teaching staff and principals; teachers are able to meet with same grade-level teachers and learn and collaborate around common goals, purposes and challenges
- Improved continuity of student learning as teachers are out of the classroom less

Principals shared challenges that have arisen since project implementation. These include:

- The need for more detailed planning and organization, including more involvement from central units, teachers and the community (Appendix II).

Overall, teachers and educational assistants (EAs) indicated support for this pilot. Highlights include:

- Believed the time spent in collaboration with other staff was valuable and in most cases, directly applicable and connected to the work in their classrooms
- An overall feeling of less stress; reduced need to plan for substitutes, reduced worries about what is/is not taught while a substitute is in their classroom,
- An appreciation of their involvement in collaborative sessions while still “fresh” (not at the end of the day)
- Increased relationship with staff within their school, across schools, and with students
- Some teachers indicated positive impact on student engagement and learning; many teachers indicated it was too early to tell

Challenges teachers and EAs shared included:

- Limited choice in network grouping
- There was a tension in meeting individual needs versus the organization of staff by grade groups
- Travel time and travel costs
- Scheduling challenges
- Teachers need time to apply what is learned – the time scheduled for this was not always honored
- The need to slow down the pace – too much content and not enough time to apply, practice and engage in dialogue about what was practiced

Of the parents who responded to the survey, 114 indicated that they strongly agree, and 172 (for a total of 71%) parents, who responded indicated that they agree with the statement: “I am supportive of the Thursday early dismissal initiative”. Sixty nine parents indicated they disagree and 51 parents strongly disagreed (for a total of 30%) with this statement (Appendix VII).

Support staff and custodians demonstrated strong support for the pilot (Appendix V and VI). Both groups appreciated the quiet time in the building which allowed them to complete tasks in a focused, uninterrupted fashion. A challenge identified by support staff was related to bussing issues (students returned to school, etc.) that they were asked to deal with. Custodians expressed concern over the level of security in the building on Thursday afternoons, as it is difficult for the custodian to identify who “belongs” (teachers visiting from other schools) and who might be a “stranger”.

Consultants provided support in various ways: facilitating network sessions; providing a series of professional learning opportunities; or providing a one time presentation. More than half of the consultants indicated that earlier dismissal format, i.e. longer time to facilitate a learning opportunity (Appendix VI), resulted in:

- A need to approach their work differently
- An opportunity to enhance their skills/abilities as a consultant
- Higher levels of teacher engagement, as well as increased levels of teacher responsibility and ownership for their own learning
- Deeper relationship with teachers, as well as evidence of deeper relationships amongst teachers with whom they are working

Challenges identified by consultants included:

- Communication and scheduling challenges
- Need for part-time staff to commit to attend all sessions
- Support from principals for teachers who demonstrate limited focus during professional learning sessions

Each of the W8 schools meets the required instructional hour; however principals must examine their hours of instruction each year to ensure they are within regulation. (Appendix X)

Student Transportation indicated that they were not consulted fully before this program was implemented. As a result of the W-8 early Thursday dismissal, additional costs incurred during the school year will be approximately \$75,000. In general, the ability to leverage routes minimizes costs. Situations that isolate a small group of schools (such as an early dismissal to the W8 grouping) eliminate a number of opportunities for efficiencies within a broader geographic area and, consequently, increases costs (Appendix X)

COPY OF E-MAIL CONTAINING THE INITIAL PROPOSAL

Memo

To: Edgar Schmidt, Superintendent

CC: Bruce Coggles, Ron MacNeil, Donna Barrett, and Betty Tams, Assistant Superintendents

CC: Kelly Hehn, Manager Student Transportation

Date: February 2, 2009

Re: W-8 Early Dismissal Proposal

W-8 would like to jointly propose the following initiative:

All 8 schools (Athlone, Belmead, Sherwood, Brightview, Glendale, Youngstown, Prince Charles and Ingelwood) would like to reorganize our Thursday Early Dismissal to be the same time for all schools. We are proposing to finish school on Thursdays at 12:20 - 12:30 pm leaving the rest of the afternoon available for staff collaboration activities.

Background:

We have all agreed to look at our timetables and rework them to make sure we meet the 1520 minutes of instruction per week and 1430 minutes of teacher assigned time as per collective agreement. We know from AISI best practices and from the research about Professional Learning Communities that allowing time for staff collaboration is vital for improving student growth and achievement. Part of our plan for Thursday afternoons would be to continue with our W-8 collaboration with grade level teams. In addition to this, individual schools can offer more in-school PD, time for staff meetings, opportunities for inter school visitations and additional time for district PD.

We have all noticed that time away from students due to staff attending Professional Development causes a lot of stress for staff. First, they have to plan a day's lesson and then when they come back, it takes extra time to get students back on track. With a full half day to coordinate PD, we hope to eliminate the amount of time away from students. We also hope that this will help reduce some of our costs as well.

Since we all currently have an early dismissal on Thursdays, most of the children who attend daycares have already paid for the afternoon so there would be no additional costs for them. We will be informing our daycares of this possible change. In addition we will all present this proposal to our School Councils for their input. Our staffs have been presented with this information and are very supportive. We also understand that we need to be in contact with Transportation to make sure there are no problems with bussing.

If you have time available we would like to invite you to one of our W-8 meetings or we could meet you at your earliest convenience to discuss our proposal.

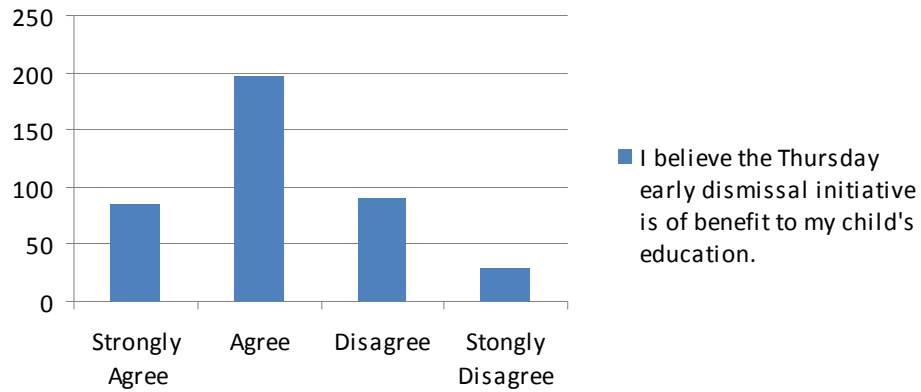
Sincerely

W-8 Principal Support Group

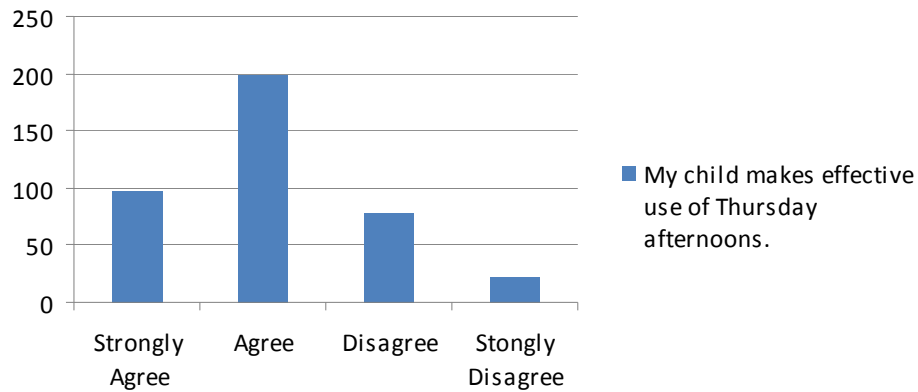
RESPONSES FROM W8 PARENT SURVEY

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
1	I believe the Thursday early dismissal initiative is of benefit to my child's education.	86 (21%)	198(50%)	91(22%)	30(7%)	
2	My child makes effective use of Thursday afternoons.	98 (24%)	199(49%)	79(20%)	23(7%)	
3	Having organized activities available (eg. Kids on Track, Beavers) is important for my child.	130(34%)	194(50%)	48(12%)	15(4%)	
4	I receive information about how staff at my child's school is using the Thursday early dismissal.	55(14%)	167(42%)	129(33%)	42(11%)	
5	I have adjusted my weekly schedule to accommodate the Thursday early dismissal initiative.	121(29%)	215(52%)	60(15%)	15(4%)	
6	I am supportive of the Thursday early dismissal initiative.	114(28%)	172(42%)	69(17%)	51(13%)	
7	For me, the best day of the week for an early afternoon initiative is	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		17(4%)	8(2%)	15(3%)	191(42%)	223(49%)

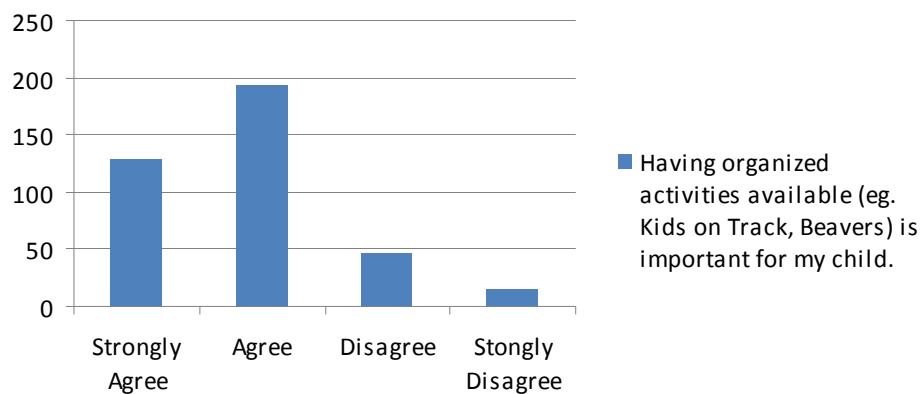
Question 1 Response Total of West 8 Schools



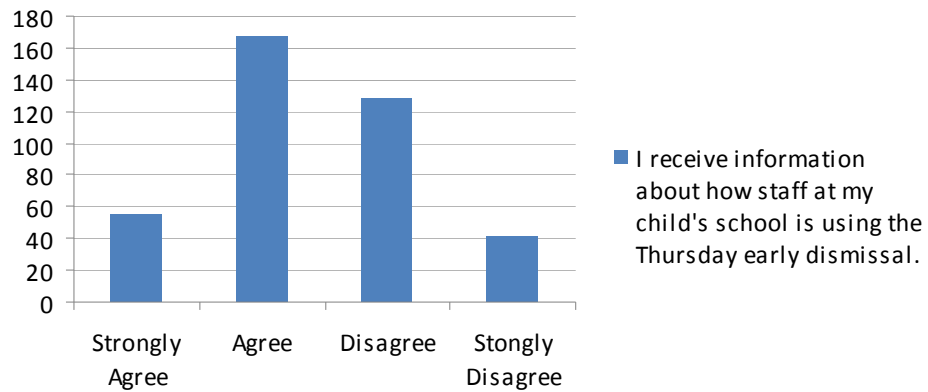
Question 2 Response Total of West 8 Schools



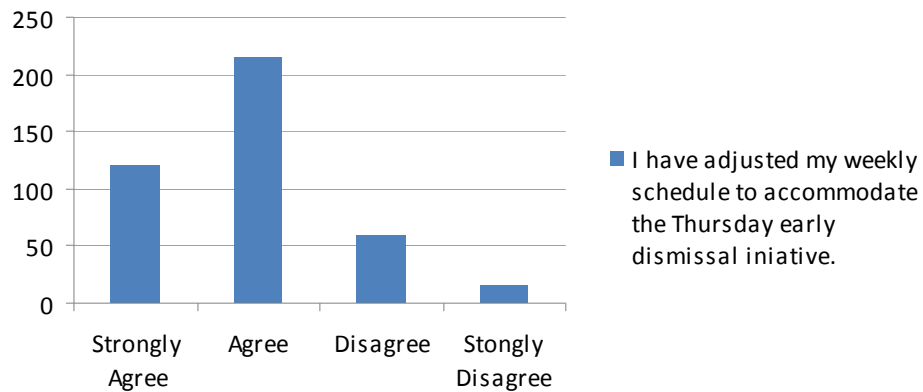
Question 3 Response Total of West 8 Schools



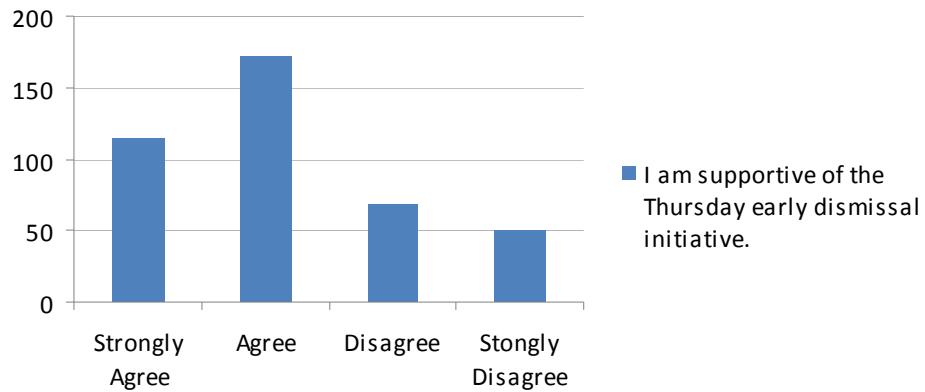
Question 4 Response Total of West 8 Schools



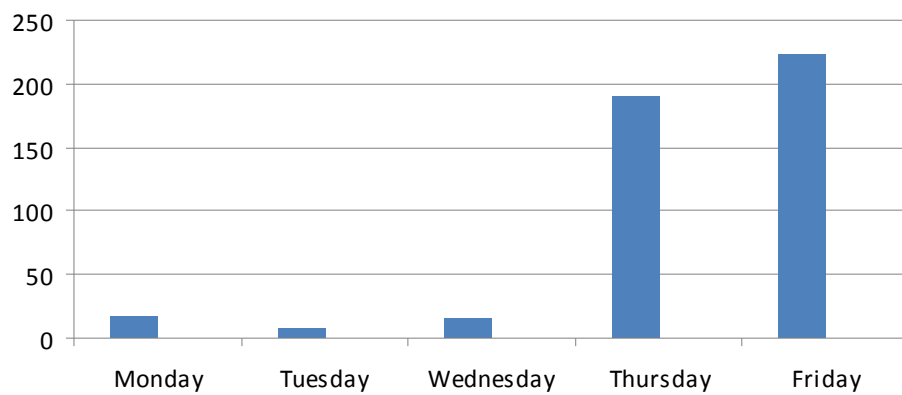
Question 5 Response Total of West 8 Schools



Question 6 Response Total of West 8 Schools



For me, the best day of the week for an early afternoon initiative is



RESPONSES FROM W8 STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

1. What do you do on Thursday afternoons?

- Eat lunch X5, eat lunch with friends X2
- Play with the wii
- Do my homework X7, have friend over and do homework
- Work with my tutor on homework
- Go to my Chinese classes
- Read
- Visit family/go shopping
- Relax
- Be with sisters
- Play my piano...other music lessons
- Baby sits little ones in neighborhood
- Deliver the Journal
- Boys and Girls Club X2...also help out with them
- Beavers
- Creative Kids Program and Mad Scientists
- Kids on Track X5
- Go to Sr. lodge
- Play with brother at home...shop with mom
- Go to daycare...out of school care
- Skate board Park
- Learning to Snowboard
- Ball Hockey

2. What organized activities are you involved in on Thursday afternoons? (eg. sports, music lessons)

- Dance
- Piano...other music lessons
- Swimming lessons
- Tutor – homework
- Chinese Classes
- Boys and Girls club...B and G soccer and art group, “Just for Fun”
- Kids on Track/music and games
- Organized Basketball X2
- Base ball...summer
- Ball Hockey
- Snowboard lessons
- Creative Kids/Mad Scientists
- Beavers
- Seniors visiting
- Out of school care...beads and crafts...sticks...gym
- Tae Kwon Do
- Basketball club (southside)

3. How do you think early Thursday dismissals are helping your learning?

- Gives me study time...I can prepare for next week
- Prep time for mid-terms
- Homework time X2...study with friends
- Book shopping (purchase) along with extra reading (money from Babysitting)
- Study time...time to catch up on things I am missing or behind on
- Extra time for me...piano done so I have extra time
- Teachers learn more...smart board...this helps me
- Teachers get support and have new focus....this helps me
- Goo making and New art
- Crafts
- Do things we cannot do in school X2...New games and
- Less rules...get to be own self
- Learn different sports that I normally would not try
- We can be creative, not like following the one rule of school; you can be yourself/be creative
- I learn because my teacher learns more
- More time to do homework
- Teacher didn't know how to use a Smartboard before; now she does and it helps me

4. Do you think that early Thursday dismissals are a good idea? Why or why not?

- Good – 14
- Bad – 0

Comments

- My time to play...get time to play with friends& family
- I get to do what I want
- Extra time for me after my work is done
- I get to have lunch at home...time to play at home
- More time to study X2...play time after along with family time X3
- Teachers go to school and learn more stuff...math....extra stuff
- Time to play with my cat (Pet)
- I get a day off/part of a day off
- Yes—because my teacher learns stuff
- I like going to K.O T
- Teacher likes to get the smartboard working better
- Do/learn stuff we never knew about before
- I help out at home and help other people
- Teachers like it...gives teachers quiet time and a chance to focus on lesson plans
- Doing/trying something new
- Chance to be creative
- Many things I get to do away or outside of school
- I like the cool stuff I do

5. What has your teacher told you about what they do on Thursday afternoons?

- Teachers have told me nothing or not really said...but....
- They have meetings X8
- Learn about Smart Boards X5 and works and plans with Teaching Assistant
- Works with other teachers to learn more about lessons and Smart Boards
- Learns about Math games
- Learns from other teachers about math and science
- Meets teachers from other schools X4
- Going out for lunch (Tims) X3
- Reading...homework X2
- Doing what they normally do...mostly work X2
- Signing tests and putting things on school-zone!
- Not having fun except when they go to Tim Horton's
- Learns how to make subjects fun
- Planning...plans lessons
- Completing work
- Teachers plan how to do something better

APPENDIX V

RESPONSES FROM SURVEY OF CONSULTANTS WORKING WITH W8 SCHOOLS

1. Please indicate your work with the West Eight Project, check all which applies. Create Chart Download		
		Response Percent Response Count
Planning and Sharing Network (Grade Group)Facilitator	<div><div></div></div>	50.0% 6
Professional Learning Presenter	<div><div></div></div>	75.0% 9
	answered question	12
	skipped question	0

2. If you are a Professional Learning Presenter do you provide single day, stand alone session(s) or a multiple day session(s) as part of a series? Create Chart Download		
		Response Percent Response Count
stand alone session(s)	<div><div></div></div>	16.7% 2
series	<div><div></div></div>	58.3% 7
not applicable	<div><div></div></div>	25.0% 3
	answered question	12
	skipped question	0

3. Has your work with the West Eight Early Thursday Pilot Project encouraged you to approach your work differently? Create Chart Download		
		Response Percent Response Count
No change	<div><div></div></div>	41.7% 5
Some Change	<div><div></div></div>	41.7% 5
Significant Change	<div><div></div></div>	16.7% 2
Complete Change	<div><div></div></div>	0.0% 0
	answered question	12
	skipped question	0

4. Has your participation in the West Eight Early Thursday Pilot Project provided you with an opportunity to develop or further enhance your skills and/or abilities as a consultant? Create Chart Download		
		Response Percent Response Count
No change	<div><div></div></div>	25.0% 3
Some Change	<div><div></div></div>	66.7% 8
Significant Change	<div><div></div></div>	8.3% 1
Complete Change	<div><div></div></div>	0.0% 0
	answered question	12
	skipped question	0

APPENDIX V

5. Has the earlier dismissal format used in the West Eight Early Thursday Pilot Project eased your ability to deliver service?			Create Chart	Download
		Response Percent	Response Count	
Increased challenges		0.0%	0	
Some challenges		16.7%	2	
Some benefits		41.7%	5	
Increased Benefits		41.7%	5	
answered question			12	
skipped question			0	

6. Is there participants' engagement with the early dismissal format?			Create Chart	Download
		Response Percent	Response Count	
Not Yet		8.3%	1	
Starting		16.7%	2	
Well on their way		41.7%	5	
Evidence in participation		33.3%	4	
answered question			12	
skipped question			0	

7. Is there evidence of participant responsibility during sessions?			Create Chart	Download
		Response Percent	Response Count	
Not Yet		8.3%	1	
Starting		16.7%	2	
Well on their way		58.3%	7	
Evidence in participation		16.7%	2	
answered question			12	
skipped question			0	

8. Is there evidence of participant ownership during sessions?			Create Chart	Download
		Response Percent	Response Count	
Not Yet		8.3%	1	
Starting		33.3%	4	
Well on their way		50.0%	6	
Evidence in participation		8.3%	1	
answered question			12	
skipped question			0	

9. Is there evidence of professional, collaborative relationships amongst participants during sessions?			Create Chart	Download
		Response Percent	Response Count	
Not Yet		8.3%	1	
Starting		25.0%	3	
Well on their way		33.3%	4	
Evidence in participation		33.3%	4	
answered question			12	
skipped question			0	

