

Alliance for Quality Education: Agenda for School Improvement Extended Learning Time To expand opportunities for students

There is a growing consensus that our education system needs to increase the time students spend in school or school sponsored learning activities. This is especially important in low-income communities, where students may not have access to enrichment activities or academic supports outside of school.

The term “extended learning time” is used to refer to everything from after-school tutoring to comprehensive school reorganizations that expand and align a wide range of academic and non-academic offerings. Some districts focus on lengthening the school day, others on adding days or even weeks to the school year.

Most parents and educators are clear, that if students aren’t learning in their current classrooms, tacking on more of the same isn’t going to help. Instead, extended learning time initiatives must be developed in ways that *redesign and refocus the entire school community* to improve student outcomes. For community-based organizations, developing a strong extended learning initiative is an opportunity to engage teachers, parents and local agencies in a collaborative process aimed at strengthening both the school and the community at large.

The federal government is supporting extended learning time initiatives through the Race to the Top (RTT) and School Improvement Grants programs. In its successful application for RTT funding, the New York State Department of Education outlined a plan to implement extended learning time for additional instruction in core academic subjects in targeted public schools. These pilot programs are a start. But meanwhile, New York State has a dramatic education deficit, resulting from vastly different educational opportunities and resources between the most successful schools in the state, and those in low-income communities, where spending is over \$37,664 per classroom less. New York needs a plan to encourage and support struggling schools and school districts to rethink their school day, week and year to provide extended opportunities to students who need them most.

Using Extended Learning Time to Rethink Schools

At their best, extended learning initiatives provide the opportunity for restructuring relationships between school staff, students and the outside community in order to redesign a school’s educational program. Typically, a well-integrated and comprehensive extended learning time initiative includes some or all of the following:

- Time for students to “go deep” in core academic subjects, including time for project-based learning and hands-on activities;
- Time for students who need it to get specific, intensive remediation on subjects where they’re struggling;
- Enrichment programs in dance, music, art, and drama;
- Outside partnerships, where students can work with local agencies, universities or service-providers on a range of projects including college and career prep classes, mentoring or tutoring, and more;
- Time for teachers to work and plan together to strengthen instruction.

Using extended learning time to restructure schools can help build the kind of alignment and support structure to enhance the delivery of a strong career and college-prep curriculum. Extended time also can be structured to ensure that teachers have the opportunity to coordinate lessons, analyze data and improve instruction.

Research suggests that a robust extended learning time initiative is a community-wide project. The first step is a comprehensive assessment of the needs of the school, existing programs and assets, and the development of a

comprehensive vision for how a redesigned school could incorporate additional time. Then, with teachers, parents, students and community-based organizations at the table, planning can begin for coordinating instruction, schedules and components of an extended learning initiative.

Examples of Successful Extended Learning Time Programs

BOSTON, MA

The extended learning time initiative in Massachusetts is funded by the state, which reviews school applications for participation, and is working to carefully evaluate the impact of the initiative. Mass 20/20 provides technical assistance to each school, and other partners serve other roles.

The Clarence R. Edwards Middle School was one of the ten schools to implement an extended learning initiative, through Mass 20/20, in the fall of 2006. Edwards serves 303 students, nearly 87 percent of whom are low income. Edwards had failed to make AYP for several years and faced state takeover. School leaders opted to restructure the school, extending the school day by about two hours each day, four days a week.

The additional time at Edwards allows for extra instruction in core academic subjects. In its first year, Edwards focused on mathematics, creating “math leagues” where small teams worked to learn and practice math concepts and held weekly competitions. After seeing significant improvements in student achievement in math, Edwards expanded to include English and Science leagues the following year. In addition, the extended day allowed Edwards to incorporate several electives into the school day, including a variety of sports, karate, cooking, Latin and jazz dance, musical theater, robotics, and music production.

Key to the initiative in Massachusetts are a couple of fundamental principles. One is to encourage the participation of a wide and critical range of stakeholders from the beginning. In each case, teachers, parents, students and the community have been brought in to help design and invest in the initiative. Another important commitment is that the extended learning time is mandatory for all students—not an add-on program for struggling students. ELT—as it’s practiced in Massachusetts—is a comprehensive overhaul of the school day.

The district worked closely with the Boston Teachers Union to develop the initiatives and recognized the immense, additional commitment that teachers were being asked to make. Participation by teachers in the extended day was initially voluntary, but the program’s results were so dramatic that the vast majority of the school’s teachers now participate. The school’s principal notes that the breadth of the initiative at Edwards is critical, because students often become engaged in learning through subjects and classes outside of the core classes. The initiative has paid off: student achievement, as well as attendance rates have increased at Edwards, and enrollment—which was declining before the initiative began—is now on the upswing.

For more information on this project, see “The Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative,” an information sheet produced by the Smart Education Systems program of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, and available at: http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/EKF08_Mass.pdf

PROVIDENCE, RI

An extended learning time program in Providence, Rhode Island was initiated by the city’s mayor, David Cicilline and is supported by A New Day for Learning, an initiative of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. In 2009, the Mayor brought together over 200 organizations, including schools, the police department, libraries, recreation centers, boys and girls clubs, the humane society and others to create community “campuses” where students could be engaged in a range of programs from 2:45 to 6pm each afternoon. Dozens of partnering organizations were asked to develop programs aligned with schools’ instructional calendar. The initiative brought together a huge variety of participants. Students have been taken out on Narragansett Bay to learn about environmental efforts, and to the Humane Society to take care of animals. Arts and community-based projects have been made

relevant to student lessons. The effort has created a wide range of activities for students, and pulled together community resources in a coordinated way. A promotional video of the project can be found at: <http://www.newdayforlearning.org/inaction.html>

Policy Considerations

There are challenges to implementation of comprehensive ELT initiatives. The greatest is probably cost. Estimates of the cost of ELT range from \$1,600 to \$2,000 per student, per year. While some of these costs can be shouldered by the agency and business partners that join together to develop an ELT initiative, in the current economic climate, districts may be hard-pressed to find the money to facilitate and support such initiatives. In Massachusetts, the State Department of Education has invested heavily in its extended learning time initiative—and is now seeing the payoff in terms of stronger academic outcomes.

In order to be most successful, members of the school community—including students, parents and local community-based organizations—should be brought to the table to create the vision and explore the needs to be addressed through ELT. Community groups should use the initiative to envision a holistic redesign of the school day, so that expanded time is not an “add-on,” but an entirely new way of structuring education in the community.

For More Information:

The After School Corporation (TASC) www.tascorp.org

“Expanding Learning Time in High Schools,” Center for American Progress. October 2006. Retrieved from: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/10/pdf/extended_learning_report.pdf

New Day for Learning www.newdayforlearning.org

Mass 2020
www.mass2020.org