

# Expanded Learning, Expanded Opportunity



How Four Communities  
Are Working to Improve  
Education for Their Students

# Foreword

From its beginnings, America’s Promise Alliance has focused on our nation’s collective calling to provide the building-block resources that young people need. We have always called them the Five Promises: caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education and opportunities to help others.

We have been especially concerned about gaps in how the promises are distributed. For too long, too many children—particularly those from low-income families and neighborhoods—have experienced too few of the promises that other young people take for granted. In school and elsewhere, the results of this “promise poverty” are sadly predictable.

Across the country, more communities are using various forms of “expanded learning opportunities”—also known as “out-of-school time” and “more and better learning”—to help narrow these opportunity gaps. While many communities focus primarily on improving classroom performance, it’s important to note that providing more and better out-of-school learning opportunities to low-income students who might not otherwise have access to them can and does help close learning gaps, too.

Expanded learning opportunities are about more than improving educational outcomes. They are about improving equity for all of our children. They are vital to helping us build a nation where all young people have a high school diploma and the opportunity to continue their educations, build careers, be ready to participate as community members and pursue their American Dream.

We are pleased for the opportunity to examine how four American communities are expanding learning opportunities for all their students. And we are deeply grateful to the Ford Foundation, both for making this study possible and for their partnership with us in the GradNation campaign.

Sincerely,



John S. Gomperts  
CEO, America’s Promise Alliance

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# Introduction

For decades, American public schools have offered their students opportunities for expanded learning beyond the traditional school day and classroom routine. They have complemented academic learning with opportunities to participate on sports teams and in other extracurricular activities from bands and choirs to clubs and forensics. They organized field trips. Some offered after school homework help and summer programs.

More recently, these traditional approaches to expanded learning have undergone an evolution. Driven by mandates to leave no child behind and join in a race to the top, many communities are becoming both more intentional and more focused about expanded learning.

For example, along with more traditional programs for the general student population, more communities are targeting efforts on students in low-income neighborhoods and low-performing schools. In addition, many are focusing more of the expanded learning effort on improving academic outcomes.

By necessity, communities also are developing more systematic approaches to expanded learning. Financially strapped school systems by themselves cannot take on all of the additional work required for expanded learning. Working with community partners and funders requires more coordinated efforts and the development of consistent quality standards. Ultimately, it also requires an ability to demonstrate that more learning is also more effective learning.

While more communities are using expanded learning to address students' needs and reach goals for schools and districts, there remains no consistent standard of practice. In fact, there isn't even a generally accepted term for what we call expanded learning opportunities. Some communities speak of "out-of-school time (OST). Others use the term "extended learning opportunities." Reflecting the origins and legacy of many of these efforts, still other communities have convened organizations with "After School" in their title, even though that term inadequately describes the broader reach of their current work. And some education experts speak of "more and better learning," which suggests something beyond simply extending opportunities and time.

Given the wide variation in terms, it's unsurprising that expanded learning efforts take a wide variety of forms. Some concentrate programs within the school setting, bringing in community partners to complement the work of school staff. Others send students outside the school building (occasionally, during official school hours) for expanded learning.

To varying degrees, communities are also attempting to coordinate the work of community providers with the work of schools. In some cases, this alignment involves adoption of common program standards and self-reporting on compliance. In others, leaders seek seamless integration of community partners in the daily work of schools to promote deeper, richer learning. And in some communities, expanded learning looks very different from "extended" learning; it involves a re-imagining of the learning day.



There is also no clear consensus on the goals of expanded learning opportunities. In some communities, student and school performance are such urgent priorities (with state takeover of schools and corresponding loss of funds at stake) that the primary emphasis is on core academic subjects. Other communities set goals involving not only academic outcomes but equity issues. These programs work to reverse the fundamental inequity in learning opportunities that often magnifies the disadvantages affecting lower-income students and their families.

## **What can we learn from such varied practices and experiences and how can they guide the efforts of others?**

In this report, we examine expanded learning opportunities in four communities that have convened GradNation summits to galvanize the cross-sector, collaborative work necessary to prepare young people for success in high school and beyond. We traveled to Grand Rapids, Michigan; Louisville, Kentucky; Memphis, Tennessee; and Rochester, New York. Rather than providing exhaustive accounts of all of the work related to extended learning, we sought to offer snapshots that highlight challenges, successes, variation and innovation.

Each of these communities is at a different stage in making more and better learning a reality for young people. Each, moreover, is following its own distinctive approach that is informed by its situation and unique combination of needs and resources.

This variation suggests that communities need not follow one established model to succeed. At the same time, the diverse experiences of these four communities illuminate some of the challenges that all communities face, with implications for how individual communities can advance their own efforts.

America's Promise Alliance is committed to sharing what works to improve the well-being of young people. In keeping with that spirit and role, we have researched these four profiles and are disseminating them via our website and other channels with the help of a generous grant from the Ford Foundation. It is our hope that these stories of community collaboration will benefit other communities as they develop and improve their own efforts to expand learning opportunities for all students.

## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

**Grand Rapids** | **The Challenge of Reach and Sustainability**

Through cross-sector collaboration, Grand Rapids went from a community with no school-based expanded learning opportunities to one with many, all fortified by a network of community and philanthropic support.

Mayor George Heartwell remembers clearly the catalyst for his city’s initial advance toward expanded learning opportunities (ELO) for its schoolchildren. It came in 1995 at a National League of Cities conference that he attended as a city commissioner along with a member of the school board. One session focused on a citywide afterschool program in Albuquerque that was enjoying early success.

“We looked at each other,” recalls Heartwell, now in his third term as mayor, “and said, ‘We could do that in Grand Rapids.’ We had zero after school programming opportunities other than what the YMCA provided. We weren’t using our buildings after the school day. It was the beginning of an interesting process.”

From that initial, “a-ha” moment, ELO in Grand Rapids grew to encompass 21,000 young people and every public school in the city. It came to incorporate the two key attributes of Albuquerque’s program—providing “a positive place for kids to go” at the end of the school day and academic rigor tied into school curriculum—that had so impressed the future mayor in 1995. It has consistently found champions among Grand Rapids’ political leadership and, increasingly, among the business community. According to Heartwell, afterschool programs are also making “an enormous impact” on rates of juvenile delinquency—a result that is helping build support while the community works to gauge the program’s effects on personal success, academic achievement and other indicators.

Grand Rapids’ implementation of expanded learning opportunities illustrates what a community can accomplish through common purpose and cross-sector collaboration. At the same time, these efforts reveal both progress and a work in progress.

Despite successes in building community partnerships and student/parent participation, officials worry about whether they are reaching enough of the children who most need the additional resources that ELO can offer; about how effectively they are measuring results; and about the durability of the external funding upon which their work now so heavily depends.

**Building Community Collaboration**

After returning from the 1995 conference, then-Commissioner Heartwell and fellow attendee Dan West, a school board member, convened an unprecedented joint meeting of the city commission and school board. That meeting eventually led to recommendations from a task force on child well-being, which in turn led to the creation of a six-person liaison committee (which continues to meet regularly) to discuss how the commission and board could work together, and engage the broader community, in extending opportunities for learning to a student population with a dropout rate above 30 percent.

Building on this momentum, in 1998 Grand Rapids’ city commission and board of education established an Office of Children, Youth and Families (which has evolved into an entity known as Our Community’s Children) to serve as an

intermediary for community collaboration and to pursue grant dollars.

“What’s unique about Our Community’s Children,” says Lynn Heemstra, who has headed the organization since its inception, “is that it’s a partnership between the city, the school district and other community partners. The strong relationship with schools and the mayor’s office positions us to get investments from other foundations and from the National League of Cities.”

Grand Rapids’ efforts to coordinate expanded learning within schools began with a mapping of assets—community programs and providers that could potentially be part of a coordinated effort to expand learning opportunities as part of an ELO Network working under the auspices of Our Community’s Children (OCC).

Next, OCC and a community collaborative worked to develop quality standards for ELO providers. They researched best practices and aligned ELO standards with both national and state standards. The standards were intended as the quality goalpost, across all types and sizes of programs, for after school providers within what would become the ELO Network.

The Network, which now boasts more than 60 organizations, coordinates programs, both within Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) and at more than 180 sites operated by community-based organizations around the metro area.

The community-based programs span a continuum from sports to the arts to homework help, and they include weekend and summer offerings. What unites these diverse community programs are adherence to quality standards and agreement on outcomes—including school attendance, behavioral impact, academic achievement and social-emotional impact.

## **Injecting Community Partners into Schools**

Community collaboration on ELO comes alive most fully at 30 of the city’s schools. In a distinctive partnership with community providers, the school system draws on federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning grants to operate after-school programs that serve roughly 4,000 students in grades 1-12.

Students and their parents sign up to participate in the programs, which run four days a week (Monday through Thursday) until 6 p.m. GRPS’ Office of Extended Learning oversees the school-based programs, which operate within individual schools through a partnering community organization, such as YMCA or Camp Fire, and directed by a site coordinator.

Within the parameters established by GRPS, and within the budgets they manage using funds from GRPS, partners enjoy wide latitude to tailor their school’s program, which must include structured academic enrichment activities; a health component that includes everything from exercise to cooking classes and lessons in healthy eating; and regular activities for families. Frequently, students take field trips, engage in community service, and have opportunities to take part in sports through partners such as First Tee.

The programs also include a component focused on building non-academic skills, such as self-control and perseverance, which correlate with academic success. Evening family activities, which may include dinner and entertainment, increase parental involvement and, for parents, build a positive association with being in the school building.

Along with the diversity of community partners serving as ELO providers, the involvement of classroom teachers is a hallmark of the program. At each site, teachers from that school oversee the hour-long, structured academic component of the program.

Teachers tailor the content based on each school’s improvement plan and on the needs of student participants. This arrangement, organizers believe, offers several valuable advantages. Teachers already know the students and their academic abilities, and they understand the areas targeted for improvement under their school’s plan. In addition, through parent-teacher conferences and other established channels of communication, teachers can recommend the program to parents of children whom they believe stand to benefit most.

Expanded learning in Grand Rapids is not limited to after school time. Seven schools also offer before-school programming (administered by the same partner that operates the afterschool program) that provides breakfast and homework help. At the same 30 sites, providers also offer summer programs with a recently added academic component. In a separate summer program, United Way volunteers provide one-on-one assistance in reading for elementary students whose achievement test scores identify them as high-need.

Funding, which mostly comes from outside sources, limits the scope of Grand Rapids' efforts. Federal 21st Century Community Learning funds, allocated to cities by the Michigan Department of Education, have been insufficient to increase the capacity in each school beyond 20 percent of the students enrolled there. The law now requires the presence of one adult for every 18 children.

"I would like to see a ratio of one adult to 12 children. I think we could make a bigger impact," says Irma Lopez, a former principal who directs the school system's Office of Extended Learning. "And we don't know whether the 20 percent we reach are the 20 percent who are most at risk."

As a result of these limits, demand for slots outstrips the supply. Each school's extended day offerings run at capacity and maintain waiting lists. The lists in turn contribute to strong levels of student participation. If students' attendance for the program falls, parents receive a letter; if the pattern continues, the student may be dropped in favor of someone on the waiting list.

## Measuring Effectiveness

Grand Rapids' efforts received a significant boost in 2012, thanks to a \$765,000 grant from the Wallace Foundation. The grant has funded the development a Youth Community Data Center, in conjunction with Grand Valley State University, that for the first time will enable the city to connect afterschool programs with daily school attendance and assess the effectiveness of after-school programs.

"We will be able to measure what combination of services is producing the best outcomes, down to the individual level," Heemstra says. "The data center will also show combined impact and show providers how they rate" among all ELO Network members. As of early 2015, Our Community's Children had piloted the measurement work at two school sites and was scaling up the data center for the entire ELO network.

The new data center, officials believe, will yield significant improvement over the current system of measurement, which involves an annual report by a local evaluator. The evaluations compare the performance of students in each afterschool program with others from the same school who are not in the program. Based on these evaluations, student participants in previous years experienced "noticeable" improvement, according to Lopez. Following the 2013-14 school year—the first in which the school-based afterschool programs were tied to each school's improvement plan—the evaluation measured "dramatic improvement" in academic performance, behavior and attendance.

For Heartwell and other leaders in Grand Rapids, school-related outcomes aren't the only important measures of success for ELO. "We've seen the impact it can make on juvenile delinquency," he says—a factor that could be significant for building support for more and better learning initiatives in other cities. "We've been able to track data around juvenile arrests and interactions with the police. The afterschool program is having an enormous impact."



## **Giving Greater Voice to Young People**

The Wallace Foundation grant is also enabling Our Community's Children to focus more attention on out-of-school-time activities for teens. In particular, the ELO Network is seeking ways to engage high schoolers more actively in developing programs that prepare them for college, work and life.

An evaluation of local out-of-school-time programs funded by the grant found that teens were less interested in programs that seemed simply like extensions of the school day and wanted more focused offerings that allowed them to learn or improve particular skills. Surveys also found that more than 80 percent of high schoolers wanted both greater input into the design of afterschool programs and more opportunities for leadership.

Among the study's recommendations were that (1) programs should better reflect the needs and wants of teens, since their engagement was key to sustained participation; and (2) teens should be enlisted not only in structuring programs but as activity leaders and recruiters.

Based on these recommendations, Our Community's Children partnered with three high schools, which served as pilot sites for student advisory teams. The teen advisors, who worked with the overall out-of-school-time program coordinator and the site coordinators at their schools, were invited to think differently about how afterschool activities were organized and advertised.

"We were in charge of the program and had to deal with a budget and come up with our own ideas and plans," one student said. "We were totally responsible." During the spring semester of 2013, two of the three schools piloting the student leadership project saw double-digit gains in participation in their afterschool programs.

## **Funding Cuts and the Threat to Sustainability**

Unfortunately, Grand Rapids was unable to build on this promising momentum in its ELO programs for high schoolers. Before the 2014-15 academic year, the Michigan Department of Education declined to renew the 21st Century Community Learning grant funds the school system had received for its high school programs. As a result, while high schoolers could still access community-based afterschool programs, the school-based programs ceased operation.

The cuts came just as Grand Rapids was launching a major new initiative, "To College, Through College," focused on improving high school graduation rates and greater student enrollment and success in postsecondary education.

In a sense, suggests Mayor Heartwell, the programs fell victim to their own success. Because the statistics for high schoolers were improving so much, he says, and because the funds were reserved for the most at-risk populations, Grand Rapids' high school students became a lower priority for the state's grant funds.

Recognizing that the school system had been receiving a share of 21st Century Community Learning funds from the state that, compared to other cities, was disproportionately large, Lopez philosophizes, "We were fortunate to keep what we kept."

Still, the cuts illuminate the precariousness of the community's ELO programs amid uncertain budget environments for local, state and federal governments. In such an environment, school system leaders hope their ELO partnerships with community organizations might yield additional dividends. Because they have established themselves as stakeholders in the city's extended day programs, these organizations might be willing to leverage their investment in young people with funds as well as volunteer support.

So far, however, the community has not been able to close the gap in high school programs left by the cuts in funding. Though some teen programs exist, more could be done to serve the needs of teenagers to prepare them for college, work and life.

“Our model is in place,” says Heemstra. “The challenge is to sustain quality practices after national funding goes away. Having strong mayoral leadership is critical. It helps that community members are around the table and are committed to an aligned and data-driven process. I think this is a reason our ELO Network has lasted as long as it has. It will last as long as it adds value to its members. But we are always looking at sustainability.”

“Our ELO effort requires investment,” Heartwell adds. “We’ve shown our creativity. What we’ve started, we can’t afford to stop.”

## Successes, Challenges and Lessons

Grand Rapids, in contrast to some cities, is an ELO effort built largely from scratch—and offers some valuable insights into how other, similarly situated cities can create their own initiatives.

One lesson: Having not only buy-in but also political leadership from the mayoral administration can be a critical driver for success. In addition, as other cities (such as Rochester) have found, situating extended learning efforts within the schools can be an effective strategy to ensure that programs are available to young people throughout the community, at sites where they are already congregated.

Because Grand Rapids created its own initiative, its stakeholders have driven the standards and worked on alignment across very diverse programs. And because the school-based programs involve teachers who already know the students, Grand Rapids may have enjoyed an advantage in integrating classroom learning with the academic components of its out-of-school-time programming.

Since the ELO effort began, Grand Rapids can point to some notable successes in terms of the number of children and partners engaged and the level of support from the community. The very name of the umbrella organization, Our Community’s Children, suggests an evolution in how Grand Rapids residents see themselves as both stakeholders and participants in the well-being of young people all across the city. And the way that leaders are actively engaging young people in shaping ELO programs is instructive for other communities seeking to increase youth participation.

School and political leaders have been gratified by real reductions in juvenile involvement with police and by perceived improvements in academic performance—enough, perhaps, that these gains alone justify the ELO investment.

Ensuring that the programs reach the children who need them most remains a challenge. Transportation and access remain challenges. And measurement of impact is still a problem.

Because Grand Rapids’ ELO efforts are so dependent on outside funding, leaders are acutely aware of the need to measure results and demonstrate progress. They have ensured a rich and persistent research agenda, and with the Youth Community Data Center, are working to ensure that the community sees its impact.

In an era of fiscal austerity, the dependence on outside funders also illuminates a dilemma that many cities face. Without outside financial assistance, it can be difficult to build an ELO initiative and the systems needed to gauge progress, improve programs and show that more learning is also better learning. Yet, without those systems, funding in a hyper-competitive grant environment can be jeopardized.

The key is being relevant, consistently adding value, and seeing system-wide returns on investments in expanding learning opportunities for children.

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## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

**Louisville** | Systems as Solutions

As part of an effort to increase high school graduation rates, Louisville leaders made a bet on out-of-school-time programs run by community organizations. Instead of adding new programs, Louisville’s strategy called for increasing capacity, participation and quality—especially for older youth—and ensuring that parents and young people were aware of and could access local programs. Some challenges—including academic relevance, data collection and transportation—remain.

As leaders in Louisville explain it, when it comes to opportunities for more and better learning, the community was “program rich but system poor.”

Expanded learning opportunities have a long and varied history in the city. In fact, youth-serving organizations offered such a large array of out-of-school-time programs for the approximately 101,000 schoolchildren in Jefferson County that, until recent years, there was no comprehensive inventory of them all. And, until recent years, there had been no systematic effort to use these programs to narrow gaps between children with and without opportunities for learning enrichment in their lives.



That all changed after 2008. In the wake of a community-wide Dropout Prevention Summit convened by America’s Promise Alliance, Louisville’s leaders formed a public-private partnership—involving the unified, city-county Metro government, Jefferson County Public Schools and the United Way—to collaborate on increasing the number of students who graduate high school on time, ready for college, work and life.

In 2010, a high-level group led by then Mayor Jerry Abramson (with technical assistance from the National League of Cities, Forum for Youth Investment and America’s Promise Alliance) issued a blueprint for improvement. YouthPrint, as the plan was known, included recommendations regarding out-of-school-time opportunities, which were to be a major element in the overall effort and would be implemented through community partnerships.

As organizers realized, making such partnerships operational and effective involved a number of the key questions other cities have also grappled with: How can we connect students and families with non-school-based programs? How can we connect the work of these programs with students’ particular needs and with what they’re learning in school? How can we target students most in need of extended learning opportunities? And how can we move toward consistent quality?

Louisville’s efforts since 2010 have centered on building an infrastructure to address these essential questions. In 2015, while community leaders can point to progress in development of systems and to improved overall outcomes for young people, and while they believe Louisville is moving collaboratively in the right direction, they also acknowledge that the questions around which their work is organized have not been fully answered.

## Getting Organized

Given Louisville’s abundance of programming by community-based organizations, planners made two key strategic decisions.

First, rather than creating a new system of out-of-school-time (OST) programs within the schools, Louisville would focus almost entirely on partnering with community providers, and through both public and United Way funding, would support them in efforts to increase capacity, participation and quality.

The decision was driven in large part by the district’s residential patterns and the legacy of countywide school busing. Many students, especially high schoolers, live miles away from where they attend school. “Transportation is an issue for these kids,” says Rebecca DeJarnatt, who heads Louisville’s Office of Youth Development. “The buses leave right after school, so we often have trouble with using schools as centers for extended learning.”

Second, Louisville decided to place particular emphasis on increasing participation in out-of-school-time programs by older school-age youth.

Following the strategies outlined in YouthPrint, the first major task for the coordinating council of BLOCS (Building Louisville’s Out-of-School-Time Coordinated System)—whose members included representatives from the schools, Metro government, the Louisville Alliance for Youth and the United Way—was simply to gain an accurate picture of the programs available for young people. “We went through a landscape mapping process,” says T.J. Delahanty, manager of Out-of-School-Time Initiatives for Metro United Way.

The process revealed that Louisville’s (OST) programs were, literally and figuratively, all over the Jefferson County map. Several organizations, for example, serve children of immigrant families. The YMCA, among its many other programs, offers mentoring for children with incarcerated parents. One of Big Brothers Big Sisters’ programs involves one-on-one mentoring of students at a private school for African American males. Mirror Mirror, a program run by a private community center, helps students learn about and gain skills for entrepreneurship. During breaks in the school year, Shawnee High School students can participate in a mentoring/career exploration program called Shawnee Ace, which matches African-American pilots who work for Louisville-based UPS with students interested in careers as pilots.

While most of Louisville’s extended learning opportunities are outside the school setting, some involve partnerships that bring volunteers into the schools. According to Dr. Allene Gold, who coordinates the volunteer program, approximately 80 percent of the district’s elementary schools (along with 10 percent of middle schools and 5 percent of the high schools) participate in a long-established program in which volunteers come into schools to help improve reading proficiency.



## Establishing Quality Standards

Once officials had a clearer sense of the OST landscape, they worked to establish quality standards programs had to meet to receive funding from Louisville’s Office of Youth Development, which provided 39 grants totaling \$685,000 in 2014, and from the United Way. Convening a diverse group of experts who reviewed state protocols and protocols from other communities, the team developed minimum quality standards for OST partners.

To measure how well they are performing against the standards, providers use a series of self-assessment tools that “are reliable to a great degree,” Delahanty says, “though some trust has to happen there.” The system was designed to avoid harsh penalties for falling short of the standards. “It’s not like you lose your funding if you don’t meet them,” Delahanty explains. “The process is to have a plan to remediate the deficiencies.”

To support providers, the Office of Youth Development (OYD) also delivers training to improve the professionalism of staff at OST programs offered by community organizations. In 2014, notes DeJarnatt, her office provided 47 different training sessions involving more than 900 participants.

But as other cities have discovered, measuring and delivering quality—which are critical to continued funding and community support—often remain elusive targets. “We’ve had funders tell us they don’t know whether the program they’re funding is a high-quality program,” says Karen Napier, director of education initiatives for the United Way. “We need to build the confidence of the community that our programs have impact.”

As the OST effort in Louisville evolves, the BLOCS team decided in 2014 to implement the Youth Program Quality Initiative (YPQI) a nationally recognized quality improvement process that reflects best practices in youth development, quality assessment, data-driven improvement planning and intensive professional development. “Providers truly see YPQI as a resource, not just something United Way is making them do to get funding,” Napier says. “And the funders are excited. The excitement is building to know what quality looks like and how to be recognized for it.”

## Coordination and Connection

Given the diversity of offerings in the community, coordinating the efforts of partners and connecting them to the academic needs of students was a challenge. As with the task of measuring quality, Louisville has wrestled with a number of questions in these areas. “There are a lot of misconceptions about OST programs among providers,” says Napier. “Do they all have to have an academic component? The YMCA may have great programs that build social-emotional skills. I don’t want all programs to be mentoring and tutoring, but I do want them to have a connection with what kids are learning in school. We have to balance the drive for academic performance with the affinities of kids.”

Louisville has turned to improved systems to help provide solutions. To be designated as “learning places,” 65 OST providers have agreed to offer computer labs with access to JCPS-approved software (Success Maker and Study Island) that enables students, during an academic intervention portion of their after school program, to continue working on what they were learning at school.

As part of the agreement, providers receive access to the school district’s CASCADE system, so they can view academic and attendance data on the individual students in their program—an aid to tailoring the work of OST providers. (Parents sign consent forms granting permission to providers to access their children’s school data.) Through CASCADE, providers can also obtain aggregate data on the students they serve—an important capability that aids them in demonstrating that their OST programs are having a positive impact.

In addition, in 2013 the community partnership implemented an internal resource referral case management system within JCPS known as Louisville Linked. The system includes information on resources accessed by students in areas such as basic needs and academic supports.

“When a janitor or teacher or counselor runs into a kid with an issue,” says Delahanty, “they can go to Louisville Linked and find the appropriate resource, make a referral, and then track the students to see if they or their families actually used the resource. We saw that over 30,000 kids, in a system of 101,000, accessed some type of resource last year, at an average of 1.5 resources per student.”

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In an effort to ensure quality and improve alignment of the work of schools and out-of-school-time service providers, BLOCS is working to build a system of cross-training in such areas as youth development and common core standards. Louisville’s work in this area—a work that is very much still in progress—illuminates one of the biggest challenges faced by other cities partnering with community organizations to expand learning opportunities.

“This has been a struggle,” Napier notes. “It was difficult for some people to leave their organizational and personal agendas outside the door, or to get out of their old comfort zones, and keep the focus on providing programs that are relevant and accessible. Our thinking is that the cross-training will help, but it can’t stop there. We have an invisible divide: The school system has all these responsibilities, but community organizations aren’t held to the same standards as schools for accountability. The challenge is building that network and communicating.”

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## Improving Access and Targeting Need

Since the beginning of the OST initiative in Louisville, organizers have worked to improve awareness and access to the variety of programs across Jefferson County. They constructed an online, searchable directory so students and parents could access out-of-school-time opportunities based on location, need and interest.

With upgrades now in progress, users will be able to access programs both online and through Metro United Way’s 2-1-1 searchable resource directory. “People without internet access can make a free phone call and talk to a real person,” Delahanty explains. New system capabilities will also allow parents to connect via text messages and receive a reply with a list of programs close to their homes. Louisville is also expanding the directory to include summer learning initiatives and offerings during fall and winter breaks.

One of the major ways that expanded learning opportunities tend to be unevenly distributed among affluent and lower income students involves transportation. In Louisville, children in higher grades are likely to attend school in another part of the county. For these students, school buses or public transportation are often the only means available for them to reach OST programs.

Recognizing how this challenge affects participation, BLOCS has worked with the local transit authority to develop solutions. Last summer, working through neighborhood-based community centers, they distributed more than 1,400 seasonal bus passes that enabled students to ride anywhere along the city’s bus routes.

Currently, they’re working with the Transit Authority of River City (TARC) to develop a microchipped card that serves as a student ID, bus pass and library card. The chip would enable officials to monitor aggregate and individual usage (such as where students get on the bus).

BLOCS is also working with the transit authority on a mapping project to better align bus routes with current OST programs and the neighborhoods where students live. “We know we have a huge gap,” says Napier, “especially in the southwestern part of the county, where we have lots of kids but few programs.”

## Progress—But How Much?

Since the 2008 Dropout Prevention Summit, when leaders made a countywide commitment to improve outcomes for young people, Louisville has seen real progress. By 2014, the on-time high school graduation rate had improved to 76.5 percent—the highest ever. Fifty-one percent of the district’s graduates now qualify as college- and career-ready—up from just 32 percent in 2008.

It's hard to say how much of the credit for these improvements belongs to OST programs. Because there is not yet a consistent tracking system used by all providers, accurate numbers, even on OST participation, remain elusive, though the United Way puts the number above 30,000 students.

"The data show that participation is increasing, but we know we're not counting a lot of kids," says DeJarnatt.

And while the community has made major strides in connecting OST providers with students, schools, social services and quality standards, they cannot yet connect those programs with academic results.

"I'd love to tell you that Louisville can demonstrate that community-based organizations are having a direct impact on graduation rates, but that's hard to do if you don't have a unified data sharing system," says Napier. "We can't draw the correlation right now."

There are measurable results for Louisville's summer learning and recreation programs. Three years ago, the community piloted a summer program to prevent summer learning loss. The program, aimed at children in the elementary grades, included both a literacy and math component. The program included pre- and post-testing and was of limited duration, so officials could measure its impact.

"What we saw was that young people in these programs did not lose knowledge over the summer, and the vast majority gained," says Napier. "Now we've got the community on fire." She notes that the United Way is using grants to expand the summer program from its two original sites, with a goal of making it community-wide.

Napier also notes another success story that, she believes, demonstrates the power of improving programming and access and, above all, of listening to the voices of young people. In the spring of 2014, she notes, "We had about 200 youth get in trouble with the police. They made their voices heard. 'We don't have programs to be involved with in our neighborhood,' they told us. Mayor Fischer had a dialogue with them. Then he went to the parks and rec centers to look at programs, especially during the summer.

"What they discovered was that we needed to upgrade the buildings and to extend the hours of their programs until 7:00 or 7:30 p.m. They trained their staffs in positive youth development. The rec centers invited other community-based organizations, like the Fund for the Arts, to come in and provide programs. Because they opened their doors the way they did, there was a big increase in participation. The Police Department issued a report showing that, in the neighborhoods of the six rec centers where they made updates, juvenile crime went down. It was a huge success story. I'm excited about where this leads."

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**"The Police Department issued a report showing that, in the neighborhoods of the six rec centers where they made updates, juvenile crime went down."**

"I think we are making a difference overall," says Dr. Gold, a member of the BLOCS committee. "We are adding opportunities for young people to increase their academic achievement. Even more, we are giving them opportunities to encounter caring adults, with places to go and folks who are interested in helping them."

Even if they can't yet quantify the impact of OST programs on graduation rates and other student outcomes, Louisville leaders believe that the degree of collaboration the community has achieved toward these common goals is a significant measure of progress. "We don't work as much in silos as we used to," DeJarnatt says. "We really try to coordinate youth services. We're still struggling with data systems, not collecting things in the same place and the same way, but overall I think we're doing a wonderful job of working together."

Echoes Dr. Gold: "We may not be where we want to be, but we've made great strides. We have great partners around the table who are all working toward the same things."

## Lessons Learned—and a Resolve to Keep Learning

Four years after BLOCS began mapping out-of-school-time opportunities, the work in Louisville illuminates both the possibilities for progress through community-wide partnerships and the long-term challenge of creating community-wide systems.

The city is well ahead of the curve on developing systems that link efforts, deliver quality and allow partners to demonstrate results. That Louisville has not yet achieved a unified system that meets all of these objectives is a reflection not on any shortage of commitment, but rather upon the complexity of the task.

Louisville's experience with expanded learning provides many lessons to other communities. First, successful efforts ultimately must connect a number of moving parts. Second, while tangible results may be essential to long-term community support, leaders can help sustain public will by building collaboratives while the systems that make them effective are still under construction.

Third, out-of-school time can be used to achieve equality of opportunity. During the city's GradNation Community Summit, convened by America's Promise Alliance in 2013, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer called out-of-school time "the great equalizer" for young people who otherwise lack access to caring adults, safe places and learning enrichment beyond the school day.

Even as Louisville continues its effort to build systems that can better quantify how OST can narrow achievement gaps, the city is moving ahead to develop a 10-year strategic plan for youth. One goal: to improve extended learning opportunities. "We put a stake in the ground," says Napier. "We believe out-of-school-time programs will turn the tide on graduation rates."

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## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

## Memphis | Innovation from the Outside In

Too few Memphis students graduate from high school; even fewer graduate prepared for postsecondary education. Nonprofit organizations targeting poor and struggling students with expanded learning opportunities are proving to be effective partners, raising student achievement and aspirations. Other efforts to innovate in state-run schools and lean on coordinated, research-based programming are just gaining traction. Will Memphis be able to sustain and expand the gains?

On any given day at East High School, you can see the “Memphis Model” in action. In classrooms across the school, and working under the direction of the classroom teacher, three teams made up of three “success coaches”—students from the University of Memphis as well as talented high school peers—work with students during the day in algebra, biology, English and reading.

On Monday through Thursday afternoons, these coaches stick around for “eighth period”—an extra 90 minutes of after-school tutoring. Wednesday’s sessions last an additional two hours, and three-hour “math blitzes” on Fridays combine math and science learning on the basketball court.

The partnership program is called “Peer Power,” and principals, teachers and staff are its biggest champions. At East, athletic coaches volunteered to move back the start times of their team practices to accommodate the after-school portion of the program. At Whitehaven High School, another Peer Power site, the football coach mandated that all of his players participate as Peer Power scholars.

In the classroom, Peer Power’s success coaches have effectively lowered the student-teacher ratio from 28-to-1 to 7-to-1. “This will help my faculty to really teach and reach all of our kids,” says Dr. Vincent Hunter, principal at Whitehaven. “This program will be the greatest outside support we have ever had.”



Peer Power is not the brainchild of education professionals. Rather, its origins can be found at the intersection of philanthropy and entrepreneurship. Local businessman Charles McVean, a graduate of East High, viewed the poor academic performance of the city’s schoolchildren with alarm. So he endowed what has come to be called “The Memphis Model”—a unique system that combines market-based approaches with youth empowerment and effective educational practices. Peer Power, which targets schools in neighborhoods of deep poverty, began in one school and has grown to involve 10 more across the city and others in neighboring Mississippi. More than 10,000 students have benefited.

The results have been impressive. In one school, pass rates on standardized tests rose from 37 percent to 91 percent for students in the program. Such gains, officials say, are consistent across the program’s locations.

According to Kela Jones, Peer Power’s director of development, ACT scores for participants in the program have increased an average of 3.27 points. At East High, whose middle school feeders are among state’s lowest performers, Peer Power participants scored in the 55th percentile among all Tennessee students in biology; nonparticipants at East scored in the 13th percentile. In English II, Peer Power scholars ranked in the 57th percentile statewide, compared to the 12th percentile for nonparticipants.

In 2011, Meah King, one of Peer Power’s faculty champions at East High School received a National Educator Award from the Milken Family Foundation. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education named Peer Power as a winner in its National Education Startup Challenge.

Peer Power exemplifies a distinctive phenomenon: innovation from the outside that is being embraced by the system and driving change within it. Arguably, the most innovative work around extended learning opportunities in Memphis involves outside organizations like Peer Power.

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**Peer Power exemplifies a distinctive phenomenon: innovation from the outside that is being embraced by the system and driving change within it.**

But as Tennessee has become a leader in the federal “Race to the Top” initiative, Memphis—home to a disproportionate number of the state’s lowest performing schools—faces enormous pressure to make rapid improvements. In an environment marked by such a sense of urgency, it’s unclear whether “the Memphis Model” will get the time and resources it needs to expand organically throughout the system.

## Overcoming Zip Codes as Destiny

The challenge facing educators in Memphis—a city with large areas of entrenched poverty—is especially formidable. Just 33 percent of Shelby County’s students are ready for kindergarten. Only 36 percent of third-graders read at grade level. One in nine high school juniors and seniors are college-ready, as measured by ACT benchmarks.

Michael Oher, whose story was chronicled in the book and movie “The Blind Side,” in many ways personified the hurdles that many Memphis children face. While Oher’s deprivation was extreme, thousands of children in the city lack the building-block resources in their lives that most Americans take for granted. In Memphis, says Margo Roen, “Zip code as destiny is a concept that is alive and well.”

Roen is the “new schools director” for the Achievement School District (ASD), which has authority from the state to assume day-to-day operational control of the lowest performing 5 percent of schools in Tennessee. Of the 83 “priority schools” in this category in the fall of 2014, 59 were in Memphis. ASD now oversees 22 of those schools mostly by relying on charter providers, while giving Shelby County Schools a three-year trial period to operate the remainder as “Innovation Zone” schools.

Like their state-run ASD counterparts, iZone schools enjoy the autonomy to extend learning with longer days and Saturday sessions, combined with intensive coaching, wraparound services and teacher incentives. The focus is heavily on improving test results, and on that score the expensive investment appears to be paying off.

Treadwell Middle School, whose results were similar to those of many of the other iZone schools, doubled its number of students meeting state expectations in reading and math—enough to earn removal from the state’s priority list. The improvements were also sufficient to draw attention from Shelby County administrators, who, amid budget cuts across the rest of the district, plan to invest \$7 million more into the iZone schools for 2016. County leaders also voted to close three underperforming schools and transfer more than 1,400 students into the iZone schools. When the shift is complete, 9 percent of the district’s 108,000 K-12 students will attend school in the iZone.

For Memphis, the iZone program is not only a strategy to improve outcomes for young people but also a matter of financial health. Declining enrollment in county-operated schools—the result of students from 22 schools moving under the

jurisdiction of the ASD—meant a loss of \$18.4 million in state funding for a district already facing a \$125 million shortfall. Many of the largest Federal and philanthropic grants that have sustained the iZone initiative are set to run out in 2016, leaving school officials concerned about how they will be able to sustain the program.

Extended learning efforts for all grades are not new in Memphis. Many of them date back 15 years or more, notes Dr. Rod Richmond, director of school and student support for Shelby County Public Schools.

For K-8 students, the district offers an after school program for which parents pay tuition (vouchers are available for families receiving government assistance). Currently, the program encompasses roughly 50 schools and serves about 4,000 students. While the program involves an education component along with field trips and other activities aimed at shaping the whole child, Richmond refers to it as “school-aged childcare.”

K-12 students in low-income neighborhoods can also participate in out-of-school time academic enrichment through the state’s LEAP (Lottery for Education: Afterschool Programs), funded with unclaimed lottery prize money and federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Meanwhile, approximately 500 secondary students in 10 schools participate in another program called Career Connections, which allows young people to engage in career exploration, build positive relationships with caring adults and gain skills that transfer into the workplace.

## How Outside Innovators Deliver More and Better Learning

While local officials, for entirely understandable reasons, concentrate extended learning efforts on the urgent need to raise test scores, programs like Peer Power extend learning in a variety of ways. By embedding success coaches in classrooms, students struggling with subject matter can receive help directly and immediately—support that is reinforced by assistance after school.

In addition, participants have opportunities to explore their own interests through Peer Power’s out-of-school-time programming. Students can take part in clubs ranging from international business to chess, gardening (in partnership with Shelby Farms on the city’s affluent eastern edge), carpentry, poetry and GEMS (Girls in Engineering, Math and Science).

For 12 weeks, Peer Power offers ACT test prep that is open to all students in Shelby County. They can broaden their horizons with “Eating across Our World,” a component of Peer Power’s ACT Prep Institute. Every week, students explore a different country through its foods (brought in from a restaurant or made by culinary club members), currency, domestic products and culture.

Once a month, during the three-and-a-half-hour Saturday sessions, local businesses and colleges partner with Peer Power to expose students to careers and educate them about skills they will need. Another Saturday each month is devoted to STEM lessons. In partnership with organizations like the Grizzlies Foundation, an arm of the local NBA team, students are involved in community service activities, such as repainting at community centers. “Sometimes,” Kela Jones says, “our work is about civic engagement.”

But Peer Power’s uniqueness lies in three fundamental aspects of the program’s design: the use of college and high school students as coaches; the insistence that coaches should be paid; and a reliance on competition to spur achievement.



“When you rely on volunteers,” says Jones, “you don’t get the same commitment”—especially from college students, who undergo a careful screening process and training. Relying instead on paid high school and college students creates peer relationships that positively affect the dynamic.

“Positive peer pressure helps drive engagement; kids hold each other accountable,” Jones says. “If your team of scholars doesn’t show up (after school), you don’t get paid that day as a tutor. So you’re motivated to get them there.”

Even the nomenclature receives careful consideration. Calling student participants scholars sets them apart and instills the feeling that they are working toward a goal.

And the competition among teams (each team has 15 scholars, 3-5 high school tutors and one college success coach) creates incentives that are as much about accomplishment as about winning prizes, which can include everything from cash to Grizzlies tickets to electronics. “It’s all having a ripple effect on the culture of the larger school,” Jones marvels, “and that wasn’t even one of our intended effects.”



## Two More Nonprofits Work After School

Like Peer Power, Knowledge Quest is a local nonprofit that addresses the needs of under-resourced children. Among the approximately 4,000 residents of the South Memphis neighborhoods where Knowledge Quest operates, 42 percent live below the poverty line; a similar number lack a high school diploma or GED. Teen pregnancy, substance abuse, gang activity and youth violence are high.

At its three centers, Knowledge Quest has capacity to serve roughly 500 children. After school, K-8 students can walk to their neighborhood center for healthy snacks, homework help, recreational activities, and “adventure education” centered around STEM and language arts. With help from community partners, the program also offers enrichment opportunities for students to explore “passion areas,” such as visual arts, ballet/dance, creative writing and urban agriculture.

While the organization’s partnerships with schools remain informal, Knowledge Quest offers in-class tutors for high school students and AP test and FAFSA preparation for seniors. They also offer family stability case management for families at four schools and three community centers.

Meanwhile, another homegrown nonprofit, Refugee Empowerment, serves approximately 250 K-12 students, representing 20 countries. The program, organizers say, grew out of an awareness that many refugee children fall behind because they had little or no access to formalized education before arriving in this country.

Staff and volunteers in Refugee Empowerment’s afterschool programs, which operate four days a week from 3-7 p.m., help participants with homework and cultivate math and language skills. Eight-week summer enrichment programs help prepare students for the coming academic year, while professors from Rhodes College and Christian Brothers University serve as coaches who offer ACT prep and help high school students develop individual plans for their postsecondary education.

In 2013, the program boasted that all of its graduating students went on to the University of Memphis or community colleges.

## Seeding Success—and Tying Efforts Together

In a city that historically has lacked a strong intermediary to address extended learning opportunities, Mark Sturgis is working to bring disparate efforts together through Seeding Success. The partnership represents schools, nonprofits, faith groups and philanthropic organizations, all working to help children succeed in school and connect to post-secondary education or careers. In particular, Seeding Success' community partners focus on a common set of goals and “work through a data-informed continuous improvement process with other sectors” to achieve them.

After 2011, when Memphis and Shelby County schools combined, the effort to coordinate their work accelerated. Leaders chose to create a cradle-to-career partnership leveraging the framework developed by the Strive Together network in Cincinnati, explains Sturgis, a former high school government teacher in Memphis who became the partnership's first executive director. Seeding Success was the result.

“Our work is at an early stage,” Sturgis says. “We have a plethora of programs that offer extended opportunities to kids. Our idea is that, if we can help them more strategically address the academic and social-emotional needs of these kids, we can see some improvement.”

Seeding Success partners agreed to focus on improving eight academic outcomes. Expanded learning opportunities can impact at least four of them: third-grade reading proficiency, middle-school math proficiency, college/career readiness and high school graduation.

For example, Seeding Success is developing a literacy pilot program that will bring volunteers directly into school for “a more systemic intervention.” Modeled on a program from Minnesota, university students will work in classrooms with small groups of students.

“Our work looks different in each setting,” Sturgis says. “It could be technical assistance in one place, professional development in others. I think we're in a great place to evaluate these things and leverage our resources. The barriers for us are to make sure the community's leadership stays committed and adults take on accountability to see that outcomes improve.”

## Seeds of Transformative Change

Programs like Peer Power that simultaneously enrich classroom learning while providing opportunities for extended learning outside of school offer transformative potential, especially for students who otherwise have too few of the resources in their lives that make for success. The growing adoption of the Peer Power model, both within Memphis schools and beyond, suggests that the promise in the program's name is being realized.

Memphis's experience also offers lessons to other communities about the possibilities of public-private partnerships. As Peer Power has shown, successful models don't always have to begin with educators and policymakers; they also can originate in the social enterprise sector and build partnerships with (and within) schools.

At the same time, the enormity of the learning gap in Memphis—as evidenced by the high number of low-performing schools and the low number of college-ready high school graduates—poses a challenge. For all their successes, programs




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like Peer Power, Knowledge Quest and Refugee Empowerment reach only a small percentage of Memphis students. To bring such a privately funded program to all of the children who desperately need opportunities for more and better learning would require a large outlay of funds in a district facing significant budget cuts. In addition to money, aligning partner efforts around desired outcomes and quality standards—work now in an early stage with Seeding Success—requires time.

And in many ways, Memphis is in a race against time. The deliberate work of capacity building must be measured against the fierce urgency of now. Too many students can't afford to wait, and the threat of a state takeover of more schools would siphon more revenue from the district's resources.

In some ways, too, the race against time creates a race between approaches to extended learning. For the lowest performing schools, the pressure to focus on improving test scores and other numerical benchmarks can squeeze out complementary and exploratory learning that also can fuel academic gains.

Yet amid all the well-known challenges it faces, Memphis's recent success with targeted student populations is serving to dispel the old, pernicious myth that the problem of low achievement in some neighborhoods and schools is intractable. While that accomplishment may be only a foundation for the larger work ahead, its import should not be underestimated. The progress and promise discovered in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods are leading more Memphis residents to recognize that zip codes need not be destiny.

## COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

## Rochester | Reimagining the School Day

Rochester’s “reimagined school day” is not merely an extension of classes in the afternoon. It’s an innovative effort that fully integrates community-based organizations into the school day—from planning to the measurement of success. So far, “time collaborative” efforts in 10 district schools have produced better attendance, academic progress, fewer disciplinary problems, and increased parental satisfaction.

At Rochester’s GradNation summit in October 2013, business and civic leaders gathered to confront some difficult realities. In this city where 50 percent of children live in poverty, the high school graduation rate for African American males was just 9 percent—lowest in the nation. While 31 percent of students statewide met New York’s proficiency standards for English and math, less than 6 percent in Rochester tested at that level. The school district’s overall performance ranked at the bottom in New York State. The summit’s convener, Rochester Area Community Foundation, distributed an education report card with grades of “F” or “Needs Improvement” in every category. Little of this came as news to attendees, many of whom had been working for years to reverse the tide of failure.



But those at the summit also had a chance to learn about how Rochester’s public schools have joined the leading edge when it comes to “expanded learning” and the use of time. That fall, the district became the first in the state, and one of the first in the U.S., to participate in an initiative called TIME—Time for Innovation Matters in Education—in collaboration with the Boston-based National Center on Time & Learning.

The initiative in Rochester began small with five low-performing elementary schools. At these “time collaborative” schools, students spent at least 300 more hours at school—roughly the equivalent of 50 extra days—during the academic year. Through a number of adjustments, including staggered start times for teachers, each of the five schools added 90 minutes to its learning day. Students also were expected to arrive 15 minutes early each morning, giving them time to settle in and have breakfast so instruction could start as soon as the bell rang.

Longer school days are not a recent innovation. Many charter schools have used them as a successful strategy for improving students’ academic performance. What makes the time collaborative schools different is how the additional time is spent. Instead of simply devoting the additional 90 minutes to reading and math (though academic work is part of the mix), students at the five Rochester schools also are spending more time on social/emotional learning and “engaging enrichment”—including art, music, physical education, community projects, counseling sessions and extracurricular activities—all in ways that connect to Common Core standards.

Even for just five locations, reimagining the school day has been an enormous undertaking for Rochester—one that has required not only the shuffling of schedules but a great deal of work to engage and train community partners and retrain teachers to move beyond old ways of thinking and notions of turf.

Results have been positive, and Rochester officials have expanded the time collaborative to another five schools and incorporated elements of it into the district’s “Linked Learning” for high school students and into its summer learning programs.

“We can’t yet claim this is the silver bullet,” says Catarena Leone-Mannino, director of school innovation for the Rochester City School District. “But it aligns a lot of best practices together, and it focuses on the whole child.”

## Expanding from Summer

In a way, Rochester’s experiment with reimagined school days was an outgrowth of the district’s earlier work with summer learning. In 2011, Rochester received a grant to expand its summer learning programs with an experimental model: Students transitioning from third to fourth grade who needed remedial work would receive six hours daily of math, reading and arts integration. To give them a head start on the coming school year, the program also exposed students to some of the learning they would seek to master in the fall.

The program “awakened their natural curiosity to learn,” says Leone-Mannino. “Even if it wasn’t purely academic, it sparked motivation in them. Suddenly, they were stars. I got calls from their teachers when they got back to school in the fall. The teachers were asking, ‘What did you DO with these kids?’

“We wanted to address the achievement gap by focusing on the opportunity gap,” Leone-Mannino continues. “Many kids just haven’t had opportunities to take part in activities that facilitated concept development and anchor learning. For example, they may never have been to a pond where they saw bugs and lily pads. So if we’re reading about the food chain, they didn’t have that frame of reference to anchor that learning. We wanted to create programing and space to offer hands-on learning that new learning could be anchored onto.”

Based on the success of the initial summer program, officials in Rochester began asking themselves, “Why can’t we do this year-round?” Their initial experience with a more integrated approach to expanded learning informed the decision to pursue a grant from the Ford Foundation that would enable schools to work with the National Center on Time and Learning.

## The ‘Third Way’

Traditionally, expanded learning opportunities have involved extra academic work, such as tutoring or homework help programs, after school. Or they have involved extra-curricular enrichment from providers outside the school setting. Rochester is pursuing what some call a “third way”—integrating academic reinforcement, enrichment programs and community providers all into a redesigned learning day.

The idea, now being implemented in a small but growing number of schools around the country, is to “support academic growth by engaging students with high-interest content and innovative learning methods,” according to a 2012 report by the New York State Afterschool Network.

Along with helping students master core curriculum, “third-way” schools also focus on social and emotional development. They seek to expose students to new places, ideas and experiences; instill a desire for learning; and help students build relationships with more caring adults by involving community partners who complement and reinforce what the schools themselves can deliver.

Community partners can expand the kinds of learning experiences to which students are exposed, including vocational education, career readiness and service learning. They can provide enrichment in areas such as drama, forensics, creative writing, public speaking and in key “soft skills” like teamwork and creative problem solving. They also can help schools reintroduce elements such as arts, music and physical education that once were regular parts of the learning day—and

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which can be “hooks” that engage and motivate students—but that have frequently received less emphasis as schools experience budget cuts and focus more of the traditional-length school day on core subjects.

Longer days with expanded learning also create time for teachers to address other subjects, such as social studies and foreign languages that have been scaled back in many schools in favor of more math and reading instruction.

For the city’s time collaborative schools, says Leone-Mannino, expanded learning means “full integration of staff and partners, with full academic supports, social-emotional learning, engaging enrichment activities, and alignment with school improvement goals. Time becomes a lever to drive continuous improvement in the schools.”

Mairead Hartmann, co-chair of the Greater Rochester After School Alliance (GRASA), says, “We’ve added the expertise of community professionals in youth development into an extended school day in a way that’s more aligned and intentional than ever before.”

Ultimately, the time collaborative model now taking root in Rochester is not simply about improving academic performance, but also about equity for low-income children.

Community officials note that affluent families spend nine times more than poor families on educational opportunities outside the school day; just a decade ago, the gap was three-to-one. Those opportunities can make an enormous difference to a child’s relationship with learning, overall education and chances of success in school and beyond.

The focus in Rochester’s time collaborative schools, says Leone-Mannino, is “on addressing opportunity gaps and mitigating the effects of poverty.” What leaders here envision, she adds, is “for kids in Rochester schools to have the same rich array of experiences that kids in the very best schools in the county have.”

Academics, of course, remain a critical focus. In fact, Rochester officials describe rigorous academics (both common core and its real-world application) as first among three primary components of the time collaborative work. A second pillar of the effort involves “differentiated supports” to meet students’ differing needs. Third, Rochester is focused on “engaging enrichment” and involving community partners.

## **The Reimagined Day**

One of Rochester’s time-collaborative schools begins the morning with a period devoted to health and wellness activities that can include everything from swim lessons to a step club, cooking and a class that helps students develop entrepreneurial abilities. Afterward, the students go into their core instructional day, then receive individualized support at the end of the day.

Another elementary school brought a teacher and a community-based provider together to combine instruction with a “cake pop” club. As part of their lessons, students learned the cost of gathering and purchasing the materials. They calculated how to price their products in order to break even. They learned about food safety regulations. Their work in the club reinforced skills in reading, math and economics.

The same school partnered with an adjoining settlement house—a volunteer-staffed neighborhood center—to strengthen literary activities in its programing. School staff and a college professor worked to help settlement house staff better understand developmental reading. Now as part of their extended learning day, students can go next door to the settlement



house, use its computers to access their individual learning pathways, and complete their work there. Meanwhile, letting the students work next door creates more time for teachers to plan, reflect and study.

At Martin Luther King, Jr. School No. 9 (PS-9), partners in expanded learning include a swim coach who teaches his sport; a music producer who helps students write and record their own songs; and a baseball coach who leads biweekly sessions that combine baseball with writing and leadership skills. A local law firm provides character education and mentoring.

As part of the extended day, students can take part in a variety of other opportunities driven by student interests, from poetry to video game design (which promotes STEM learning) to knitting (which promotes teamwork).

Most innovative of all, PS-9 students create news programs via the local community access station. They write the scripts, handle all aspects of production and edit the video on computers back at school, building skills that align with the Common Core.

Student curiosity about a nearby reservoir prompted one of the TV group's signature projects: a documentary about water conservation. The fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders in the class researched the history of Rochester's water supply, wrote a script, found images online and created a video that is now being used to educate adults and young people alike about using water wisely.

"We're not to the point yet of co-developing curricular units—say, 10 weeks on health, with a biology teacher talking about the impact of unhealthy eating on health and someone else teaching students about recipe-based substitutes to reduce calories," says Leone-Mannino. "We would all own those outcomes collectively, and the impact would be deep collectively instead of shallow. It would be linked to common core, linked to habits of mind, and linked to character education. That's my dream."

## Integrating the Work of Teachers and Partners

Perhaps the heaviest lift for the time collaborative effort in Rochester has involved integrating community partners into what officials hope will ultimately be a seamless extension of each school's staff.

In some communities, the expanded learning work has been driven by certified teachers. But leaders in Rochester recognized that their community partners were a strong asset—and an indispensable one, since teachers alone couldn't provide the volume of expanded hours or all of the types of learning opportunities Rochester wanted its children to receive.

"We knew the answer wasn't just more test prep, drill and kill," Leone-Mannino says. "That took the joy of learning out of it for students. We knew we needed to address the needs of the child, and we knew we couldn't do it alone."

For both school staff and partners, moving beyond collaboration to integration represented a shifted paradigm. "It required a whole new way of thinking for district staff, who had been used to working behind closed doors," says Leone-Mannino. "And it's a new way of thinking for community providers, who were used to coming in after school and delivering their programs with minimal interaction with school staff. Our biggest challenge was recognizing that partnership is a process and not an event."



As part of that process, the time collaborative schools and partners came together to engage in planning processes. Partners came to see how they helped advance the school's goals, and their work was integrated in school improvement plans.

Together, schools and partners looked at what students and their families wanted to gain from the expanded day, what data revealed about the specific areas where students needed to improve, and how providers could complement schools' strengths to engage the whole child (and, in some cases, the whole family).

From sharing information, the school district and school partners moved to capacity building. Partners hired additional staff to accommodate more than 2,000 students who were part of the time collaborative that first year. The district began offering professional development jointly for school and partner staffs. They worked together in planning program improvements.



Reflecting on the experience, Dwayne Mahoney, executive director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Rochester, one of the partners in expanded learning programs, says, “We are learning a new culture in school. In some cases it goes very quickly, and in others you have to nurse people along a little bit. It also takes good leadership in the school. Good leadership at the ground level at the school helps change go a little faster. And when things don’t work, good leaders can put changes in place.”

Partners like the Boys & Girls Clubs have benefited from training provided by the district and the Greater Rochester After-School

Alliance. In addition, the district office of extended learning hired a full-time staff member to work onsite with community partners.

As part of their joint professional development, partners and teachers take part in daylong training sessions during school breaks, and there are monthly meetings between school-day staff and community program staffs.

“It’s very complex and complicated work,” says Mairead Hartmann. “It’s definitely a learning process.” But she believes it is an essential process that allows school staff and partners to examine some key questions: “What should partners bring to the school during the day? How do we know it’s high quality? How do we define enrichment? How do traditionally trained teachers define enrichment? How do partners define it? How do we move forward together?”

A “hidden benefit” of focusing on these questions, Hartmann says: “It also helps the teachers better understand what quality looks like. I would love to see more time built into the day for planning with community partners.”

She also hopes to see teachers and partners operate from an understanding of enrichment that incorporates social and emotional health into academic achievement—a sense of “expanded learning that is not only about time.” If that can happen, the old demarcations between teacher and partners will fade. “We hope it will become so seamless,” Hartmann says, “that students will only identify people as caring adults and not just as teachers or program partners.”

For teachers, even more, the reimagined school day has been an adjustment. Initially, some found it difficult to understand how the reimagined day represented a better use of their time. There were issues of turf and sharing responsibility. It’s one thing, after all, to hand off students to providers of afterschool programs. It’s quite another to hand them off for parts of the learning day, especially when teachers are the ones held accountable for academic results.

In addition, expanding the learning day for all students meant expanding it for staff, too, and not all staff wanted longer hours. So Rochester devised staggered start times for teachers in the time collaborative schools. Now, teachers are finding that the expanded day gives them more one-on-one time to help individual students, and more time for collaboration and professional development.

And teachers have discovered that partners can help them not only educate children but work with them more effectively on multiple levels. “Often,” says Mahoney, “teachers can’t get to teaching their subject because they’re dealing with behavior issues. Having community partners who know the kids personally allows them to help when teachers come to them for insights into how to help the kids.”

## Measuring Progress

The experiment with reimaged school days in Rochester is a race against time. On one hand, the city’s low-performing “priority schools”—including the time collaborative schools — are under pressure to make rapid improvements to reach state benchmarks. On the other hand, what Rochester has undertaken is nothing short of a transformation.

Apart from academic performance, the time collaborative schools can point to successes in areas not measured on New York’s school report cards. Officials note that student attendance is better. Discipline problems are fewer. Parent satisfaction has improved. “My state report card isn’t measuring those,” says Leone-Mannino, “but they have moved the needle.”

Solid data on improvements related to expanded learning are critical not just for the state, notes Jennifer Leonard of ROC the Future, Rochester’s community-wide, cradle-to-career initiative that works to build collaboration, align resources and share data to achieve collective impact. “It’s a challenge,” she says, “for partners to get data on student outcomes that they can use to justify their work to their funding sources.”

Rochester is also working to develop ways to measure an array of important outcomes beyond academic indicators. As part of a formal process, says Hartmann, “We interviewed about 200 people in the community: students, parents, providers, advocates. They identified outcomes that were important to them – and which were very much in line with national research. Now we’re looking at tools to measure those outcomes. We started with social/emotional health, and we’re piloting a measurement of that. We’ll spend the next three years looking at how to impact that by developing supports, training and coaching.”

## Impact Beyond the Time Collaboratives

Outside the time collaboratives, Rochester still operates more traditional afterschool programs for students across the district. The community continues its summer learning programs that opened eyes in 2011. And, as it has since 2001, the Greater Rochester After-School Alliance, an extension of the Rochester Area Community Foundation, continues to promote community collaboration aimed at improving the quantity, quality and accessibility of out-of-school-time programs.

But even if the number of schools in the time collaborative remains small, the lessons learned there are spreading. All of the district’s schools on the state’s priority list have added 200 extra hours of instructional time to the school year.

While Rochester officials admit that high schools have been more of a challenge (time collaboratives around the country have focused on grades K-8), local high schools have lengthened their schools days and connected the extra time to the Linked Learning model from California, which emphasizes learning along career pathways.

As a reflection on how committed the district has become to a more integrated approach, the scope and quality of community partnerships are now among the criteria used to assess Rochester schools and their leaders.

GRASA, meanwhile, now focuses on afterschool programs and expanded learning. In fact, officials say GRASA played a key role in helping break down barriers between schools and community partners, brokering conversations and fostering the joint professional development that is working to make “teaching” a more seamless effort between traditional teachers and community partners.

In some ways, expanded learning days in Rochester (in both the time collaborative schools and others) have made relationships with traditional afterschool programs more complex. Will these programs continue? Will community organizations involved in traditional afterschool programs have to adapt their services to remain involved?

For example, some childcare providers serve schools where both the extended day model and the traditional afterschool model operate side by side, notes Jennifer Leonard. “There’s a sense,” she says, “that the traditional afterschool model is being marginalized.”

By their own assessment, Rochester officials determined that afterschool programs were reaching only 11 percent of the students—a small number for a district that needed so much across-the-board improvement. Given the state’s mandate that all “priority schools” extend their learning days, the traditional separation between school and afterschool in Rochester is likely to diminish further. The larger question appears now to be whether the expanded learning model will gradually become more of the norm for all of the city’s students.



## A Commitment to Reimagination

One of the challenges for a city with an urgent need for educational improvements is to demonstrate, in a relatively short amount of time, the benefits of an approach that involves a reimagining and a process of evolution.

Right now, there are questions: Will the state allow a district that ranks at the bottom enough time for what can only be a gradual transformation? How will New York balance the desire to leave no child behind with an approach that will reach only a portion of Rochester students right away? Will the local business community get more involved in connecting school more directly with skill development and career mentorship?

The answers to these and other questions are not yet fully apparent. But champions of the time collaborative approach believe they are on the right track.

Mairead Hartmann points to Martin Luther King School No. 9 as a microcosm of the effort in Rochester. “That first year for School No. 9 was so difficult,” she says. “But, by the close of the second year, they’re being held up as a national example. I can’t believe how far they have come. It’s so important to be patient and persistent, but also to pause and reflect on our successes and how the conversation continues to evolve.”

“This is an important trial of a concept that makes sense,” says Jennifer Leonard. “It allows kids access to a lot more adult role models during the day. It meets the needs of working parents. It is still a work in progress. But we’re proud that we’ve done it.”

# Implications

In their varied journeys toward more and better learning for students, the experiences of Grand Rapids, Louisville, Memphis and Rochester have implications for the efforts of other communities.

Here is a summary of our conclusions.

## Community collaboration is essential—and challenging.

A founding premise of America’s Promise Alliance is that the responsibility for the well-being of young people belongs to the entire community. For that reason, cross-sector collaboration is critical to the success of initiatives that aim to provide more and better learning time.



By themselves, schools and community-based organizations simply cannot provide young people with all of the resources they need for success. That is especially true when it comes to students from families and neighborhoods with few resources to complement the learning opportunities that students expect to receive in school. In the long run, political support and the involvement of the business community may be as important as the hands-on efforts of learning providers.

The experiences of Grand Rapids, Louisville, Memphis and Rochester all reinforce the importance of cross-sector collaboration. While that importance may seem self-evident to those already engaged in such efforts, many communities still conduct their expanded learning opportunity (ELO) work largely in silos, reducing the potential for synergies between schools and community providers and reducing the potential impact on schoolchildren.

Still, recognizing the need for collaboration is the easy part. As all four communities in this study have found, the work of bringing partners together is much more difficult. Beyond common cause and establishing common goals—no simple tasks in themselves—

communities must address an array of potential barriers to effective collaboration: establishing (and upholding) standards of quality; overcoming traditional turf issues by providers (within schools and community organizations alike); sharing data; and connecting out-of-school-time programs in meaningful ways to students’ academic needs while becoming more than simply a continuation of the school day.

## Accurately assessing progress is a bottom-line issue and could be a matter of survival for expanded learning programs.

For various reasons—including the relatively short time that coordinated, community-wide ELO initiatives have been underway—the four communities studied here have consistently turned to measurement of progress in a last-but-not-least way.

While community leaders can point anecdotally to gains made by students in particular programs, and while work is underway on broader and more concise measurements, to date none of the four communities has a fully functioning, comprehensive system that measures the effectiveness of expanded learning programs in yielding the key outcomes that these communities seek. One issue, surely, is the challenge of pinpointing, among many academic and socio-emotional

inputs, which specific programs are responsible for improvements in students' performance. Another is the special expertise required to design and operate accurate systems of measurement—expertise for which communities may need to seek outside partners (and additional funding).

Up to this point, some communities have embarked on ELO initiatives based largely on faith that they would deliver results. Now, in an environment when many school and municipal budgets face cutbacks and competition for finite grant dollars has become more intense, the need for ELO programs to demonstrate positive return on investment is more critical than ever. In fact, the ability to link programs with quantifiable student progress may determine whether existing programs in some communities will continue beyond an initial round of funding.

But ELO practitioners should also exercise caution that, amid the importance of demonstrating positive results, they also look carefully at the inputs received by student participants. Funders and community leaders often hold providers accountable for results without carefully considering inputs. Assessing both is important to any accurate gauge of progress.

## **Academic improvement is not the only important outcome for expanding out-of-school time.**

In Louisville and Grand Rapids, increasing access to out-of-school-time opportunities has been credited with reducing juvenile crime and interactions with police. These reductions have been important to building support from political leaders and the business community while the wider community waited for anticipated academic gains to materialize. Therein lies a valuable lesson for leaders who seek to “sell” ELO initiatives to their communities based exclusively (or primarily) on the promise of improvements in student test scores, high school graduation rates or other academic outcomes.

Community leaders may recognize competing dynamics at work here. On the one hand, the need to improve students' academic performance is frequently the most important driver behind a coordinated, community-wide effort to extend learning opportunities for children. In some communities, moreover, the need for academic improvement is so urgent, and the pressure on schools so great, that “extended” learning largely becomes an extension of the students' studies during the school day. It is understandable, therefore, that officials would evaluate the success of ELO initiatives first and foremost by academic outcomes.

On the other hand, however, measuring the worth of extended learning opportunities targeting low-income children by academic outcomes alone risks creating a view of these young people as nothing more than a sum of academic scores. That's not the view we, as a society, typically take of more affluent students, for whom out-of-school-time activities are seen as enrichment opportunities or elements of a well-rounded education.

While academic improvement may create the impetus for a coordinated ELO effort, organizers shortchange children if these efforts fail to encompass children's social-emotional development; help them develop “soft” skills such as perseverance and teamwork that are essential to their success; engage them as motivated learners; and help them explore different ways of learning that complement and reinforce their classroom work.

## **A well-designed effort to promote more and better learning requires cities to re-think a number of seemingly unrelated issues as well.**

In Louisville, leaders learned that it wasn't enough to enlist ELO providers who agreed to follow high quality standards. It wasn't enough to share data so out-of-school-time programs could better understand and address the needs of children they serve. And it wasn't enough to promote awareness of various program offerings.

Without adequate transportation after school to connect students with programs, access for low-income children to extended learning opportunities—the very problem that ELO initiatives seek to remediate—would remain inadequate.

Louisville's experience illustrates how issues that may seem unrelated can have a major impact on youth participation. Delivering equity in access to learning opportunities means not only targeting populations with unequal access now; it also means seeing to it that children have safe routes to school and out-of-school-time activities, safe neighborhoods where they can take part in such programs, and strong local institutions.

In some communities, this may require escorting children to program sites, extending the hours of community institutions, or (as Louisville has explored) working with the public transportation system to help children connect with opportunities.

## **Expanded learning relates directly to college and career readiness, regardless of the age level of children involved.**

In some communities, efforts to improve extended learning opportunities have been explicitly tied to the specific target of college and career readiness. Because these are clear goals, they can be (and have been) important for building community support and winning funding for programs.

Targeting college and career readiness may also lead communities to focus more attention on middle- and high school students than on those in the elementary grades. But the link can be shown between more and better learning and college readiness even for younger children.

For example, children who do not read at grade level by the end of third grade have a high likelihood of leaving school before earning a high school diploma. And children who start kindergarten six months or more behind their peers are less likely to read at grade level in third grade. Communities should take a long-term view in designing their ELO initiatives, giving as much consideration to programs that help younger students succeed as to high schoolers.

For students at all grade levels, communities should also consider how their ELO programs can contribute not just to college/career readiness but to readiness for civic participation and community leadership.

## **Young people need to have a voice in designing expanded learning opportunities.**

America's Promise Alliance has long believed that young people deserve a strong, respected voice when it comes to the work of communities in support of their well-being. More and more, young people enjoy a place at the civic table. However, in matters of education, including extended learning, students too often remain objects to be assessed and addressed rather than voices to be heard and active participants in program design.

All four of the communities in this study are taking steps to involve students to a greater degree. Grand Rapids officials, hoping to increase youth participation in its school-based ELO programs, gained valuable insights simply from surveying young people and then giving them a much greater role in program design.

Louisville officials experienced an "a-ha" moment after a spike in juvenile crime in several neighborhoods. When they talked to young people there, they heard that more students would take part in programs at neighborhood centers if the hours were extended from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. After the centers changed their hours and added more programs with outside partners, juvenile crime in those neighborhoods shrank significantly.



In Rochester’s “time collaborative” elementary schools, a variety of activities during the expanded learning day are driven by student interests—a recognition by adult leaders that providing students with a level of freedom, and then creating programs that match their interests and align with academic goals drives a deeper level of student engagement. It transforms students into more active participants in the learning process rather than passive objects to be taught.

Because of pressure to improve academic outcomes, and in part because of issues of traditional turf, giving young people a greater voice in the structure and content of expanded learning opportunities remains counterintuitive for many. Yet if expanded learning opportunities are to be anything more than simply longer versions of traditional school days and routines, youth voice will be essential to the success of the effort.

## **In the long run, more learning must also be better learning.**

As a leader in one of the four communities put it, “I am sure that we now offer more learning. I am not sure that it is better learning.” Her comment, echoed by leaders in other communities as well, illuminates not only the challenge of accurately assessing the quality and impact of extended learning opportunities. It also raises important questions about program design, access and equity.

It is understandable that the drive to narrow the achievement gap between students in low-performing schools and their more affluent counterparts has created a heavy emphasis on “more”—more homework help, more academic drilling, more test prep. Such an emphasis, of course, offers obvious benefits, as standardized test scores improve and low-performing schools move off of “priority” lists. Yet it is not entirely clear that more equals better, even if more academic learning leads to improvements in test scores.

While test scores are an important benchmark, they are not always a measure of “better” learning. In fact, in environments where raising test scores is the highest imperative, we risk viewing programs that produce greater long-term impact on academic performance and career readiness as luxuries rather than essentials.

In devising their ELO programs, communities should consider both the value of expanding opportunities for academic learning and for instilling a zeal for learning.

Without careful attention to both academic gains and learning that engages students on a deeper level, we risk treating impoverished children more as educational problems to address than as multi-dimensional young people to cultivate. And we risk attempting to close gaps in academic performance without closing gaps in resources between children from areas of concentrated poverty and those from more affluent backgrounds.

ELO efforts that focus on education and ignore equity inadequately serve the children they are intended to help, even if they improve reading levels and math scores. Working to make learning better without doing more to address the gap in resources and opportunities for low-income children will fail to make the promise of America real for every child.

This study is yet another reminder that children in poverty need—and deserve—both more and better opportunities for learning, enrichment and personal development both in and out of school.

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**We risk treating impoverished children more as educational problems to address than as multi-dimensional young people to cultivate.**

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## America's Promise Alliance

America's Promise Alliance leads an alliance of organizations, communities and individuals dedicated to making the promise of America real for every child. As its signature effort, the GradNation campaign mobilizes Americans to increase the on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and prepare young people for postsecondary enrollment and the 21st century workforce. [www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)

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## The Five Promises

### Caring Adults

Young people need to be surrounded by caring adults providing love, challenge, active support, a vision for a brighter future and opportunities for them to take responsibility for their own lives.

### Safe Places

Young people need physical and psychological safety at home, in school, online and in the community.

### Healthy Start

Young people need the conditions that make it possible to grow physically, socially and intellectually, starting at the earliest ages.

### Effective Education

Young people need not only a high school diploma, but a high-quality learning experience that prepares them for college and career.

### Opportunity to Serve

Young people need service opportunities to help them develop belonging in their communities, empowerment to be positive contributors and a sense of personal responsibility.

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