



New York: Expanding Time, Increasing Opportunities for Achievement

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New York is poised to take an important step to improve student achievement by expanding learning time for students attending high-poverty, low-performing schools. Recent district- and state-level investments in expanded learning time—a promising strategy to close achievement and opportunity gaps—will give students more time to learn core academics but not at the expense of extracurricular activities such as music, art, and sports. Expanded learning time also provides teachers with more time for collaboration, planning, and professional development. What’s more, New York’s strong history of working with community partners will help support schools that decide to significantly lengthen the school day. Other school districts and states that are interested in boosting student performance, closing achievement gaps, and expanding enrichment opportunities should follow New York’s example and consider a significant investment in expanded learning time.

Laying the groundwork for expanded learning time

In 2011, in exchange for exemption from certain No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, requirements, the U.S. Department of Education, or DOE, invited states to submit plans to implement education reforms, set high standards for all students, and close achievement gaps. Known as Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility, or ESEA flexibility, this program requires states to outline interventions in the state’s lowest-performing schools—called priority and focus schools—in order to receive the NCLB exemptions.¹ In doing so, states must ensure that the interventions are aligned with the seven turnaround principles established by DOE to improve the academic achievement of students in priority schools. One of these turnaround principles asks states to “redesign the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration.”²

In conjunction with this turnaround principle, and possibly to make it easier for some schools to meet this requirement, ESEA flexibility also allows states to tap into the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, or 21st CCLC, federal funding stream to pay for expanded learning time. This is in addition to the before-, after-, and summer-school programming that has been the traditional uses of such funds. As the Center for American Progress described previously, DOE's decision to support expanded learning time is wise.³ Not only is there a growing body of research suggesting that more time in school can positively affect student achievement, but a number of states, districts, and schools are also committed to redesigning the school day.⁴ A recent count identified more than 1,500 expanded learning time schools—about 900 of which were traditional public schools—and 33 states considered expanded-time legislation in 2013.⁵ Furthermore, at least 24 states and Puerto Rico have been approved for 21st CCLC flexibility and are increasing learning time this school year.⁶

The Center for American Progress will be closely watching how states implement the 21st CCLC flexibility. When implemented as part of a comprehensive school reform effort, expanded learning time has great potential. In particular, a lengthened learning day in high-poverty schools provides students with more time for academics and enrichment activities such as art, sports, and hands-on learning. It also gives teachers more time for planning and collaboration. On the other hand, any implementation effort that is not well planned can be a lost opportunity to boost student achievement and to close opportunity gaps in much-needed enrichment activities for low-income students.

New York's ambitious approach to expanded learning time

In particular, the state of New York has an ambitious approach to expanding the school day that will allow many schools to combine federal support with a state-run grant program. Focused on its lowest-performing schools, the New York State Education Department, or NYSED, has used its ESEA waiver to require priority schools to expand the learning day by a minimum of 200 hours per school year for all students in a school building.⁷ In addition to using 21st CCLC grant funds, some schools will have the option of utilizing a statewide grant focused on expanding the school day, as proposed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) in January 2013. This competitive grant program will support schools that develop approved plans to improve student achievement that include extending the school day or year by at least 25 percent.⁸ The New York state legislature funded the \$20 million grant program in March 2013⁹ and NYSED released a request for proposals.¹⁰ The grantees will be announced this year.

The New York Extended Learning Time grant program—modeled off of a similar initiative launched in Massachusetts in 2006¹¹—will provide districts with funds to enable schools to increase learning opportunities through high-quality, redesigned extended school day or extended year programs. School districts can work independently or in collaboration with community-based organizations. These three-year grants must focus

on improving academic achievement through expanded learning time. The additional instruction or educational programs must be provided for all students, but the grant focuses on more than core academics. The expanded time must also provide students with a range of enrichment activities, a critical component to closing the opportunity gaps that are prevalent in low-income schools.¹² Additionally, grantees are expected to use the time for teacher collaboration and professional development. Also of importance, schools are expected to use data to continuously improve instruction and learning, ensuring that the extra time is used wisely. The additional time can occur before or after school, during the school day, over the weekend, or during school vacations, including the summer.

Anticipated per pupil costs will be covered by the grant—specifically, 10 percent of the school district’s annual operating expenses or the expected per-pupil cost of \$1,500, whichever is greater. Awards will be based on the projected number of students attending a selected school, and payment will be based on average daily attendance and the amount of additional learning time. Priority will be given to schools serving grades six through eight and schools that serve a high-need population. Should school districts want more planning time, up to \$10,000 in additional funds is available for implementation planning during that same time period, with a commitment for implementation during the 2014-15 school year.

New York joins Massachusetts in making substantial state-level commitments to provide students and teachers with more time—an important tool needed to make vast improvements in student achievement in under-performing, low-income schools.

Expanded learning time at the district level

Even before the launch of the state’s Extended Learning Time Grant Program, New York school districts were already developing ways to increase learning time.

Rochester

Five Rochester elementary schools¹³ have joined the Time for Innovation Matters in Education, or TIME, initiative,¹⁴ which helps schools to redesign and expand their school day by at least 300 hours per year. This five-state initiative is led by the National Center on Time & Learning and the Ford Foundation and locally spearheaded by the Rochester Area Community Foundation. In another 13 of Rochester’s lowest-performing elementary schools, the school day will increase by at least 200 hours per year. Finally, two high schools will employ flexible scheduling to gain more time during the day.¹⁵ Flexible scheduling can, for example, allow schools to determine the schedule that best meets the needs of their students by allowing more time for specific subjects, such as math or English language arts.

Syracuse

A collaboration between the Syracuse City School District and the Syracuse Teachers Association established an iZone—a cluster of schools that are piloting new, research-based interventions—in 7 of its 19 priority schools.¹⁶ Its whole-school reform approach to improving student achievement will, among eight other interventions, increase the school day by an hour and a half. Each school will dedicate one additional hour to student instruction and 30 minutes to teacher planning and collaboration. All staff working during the extended time will receive a stipend. If this school reform approach is successful, the district will implement these strategies district-wide. This effort was launched during the 2013-14 school year, and data are not yet available on its student impact.

New York City

New York City, in collaboration with numerous community-based organizations, offers a variety of expanded learning time options to students who need it most. One such option falls under the expanded Middle School Quality Initiative, which is currently in its first year of implementation.¹⁷ Through a partnership with The After-School Corporation, or TASC, and the Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard University, or EdLabs, middle school students at 20 schools receive at least 12 hours per week of literacy-focused support and enrichment to build academic and personal behaviors within an extended learning day. Under the initiative, students struggling with reading comprehension receive an EdLabs-designed tutoring model, with all students receiving academic enrichment and opportunities for social and emotional development, such as positive communication skills, and positive interactions with adults and peers.

These district efforts combined with the state extended learning time grant will create a robust environment for schools to significantly lengthen the school day and support student learning and teacher collaboration, professional development, and planning.

Community partners complement expanded learning time in New York

One advantage of providing students with a longer school day is the potential for exposure to a breadth of enrichment activities, such as music, sports, and art. New York-based community partners are playing a critical role in making expanded-time schools successful. TASC, for example, has a history of enlisting community partners to lengthen the school day. Building from its experience as an afterschool provider, TASC launched the ExpandedED School initiative, which uses school-community partnerships to provide students with more time for academic support and enrichment facilitated by a mix of coaches, teaching artists, community educators, and AmeriCorps members.¹⁸

Harlem's Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School, or TMALS, is an ExpandedED School that primarily serves low-income students and provides a good example of how these partnerships can improve outcomes for students. TMALS' redesigned school day runs from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with alternating academic and enrichment days, for students in grades K-2 and 3-5.¹⁹ In partnership with the Abyssinian Development Corporation, TMALS ensures that students have opportunities to participate in yoga, art, capoeira, and other activities. Fridays are reserved for community service projects led by AmeriCorps members, which gives teachers much-needed time for weekly planning meetings and professional development. What's more, the extended day appears to be making a difference. During the 2012-13 school year, TMALS students performed on par academically with schools that serve similar students. However, student test scores in both English language arts and math improved more in TMALS between the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years than in schools serving similar populations.²⁰

Organizations and schools throughout New York state are also collaborating to effectively expand learning time. For example, the National Center on Time & Learning and TASC are leading an effort to establish one statewide framework for expanded learning time. The goal of this effort is to have a conversation among expanded learning time stakeholders in the state, including Gov. Cuomo and the New York State Afterschool Network, in order to create a menu of expanded learning options. Schools and districts will then select the programming options that best meet their unique local needs.

Conclusion

Aimed at high-poverty, under-performing schools, expanded learning time is a promising strategy that provides students with more time for academics and enrichment, and gives teachers more time for planning, collaboration, and professional development. New York is well positioned to implement a state-level approach to increased learning time. Not only does it have state funding to lengthen the learning day, but it also has a strong history of partnering with community-based organizations and afterschool programs to enrich students' learning experiences. From Rochester to New York City, exciting expanded learning time initiatives are developing across the state, bringing New York one step closer to closing achievement and opportunity gaps for its most disadvantaged students. Other states and school districts would be wise to consider these approaches to increasing learning time.

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Endnotes

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