

# Issue Brief: Enrichment in Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Schools



## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

This brief highlights key information about enrichment activities, which represent one of the main components of the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time (ELT) initiative.<sup>i</sup> Over time, the ELT initiative has supported over two dozen schools across the Commonwealth.<sup>ii</sup> A comprehensive evaluation of the ELT initiative found that implementation of the core ELT components varied considerably across schools. In this brief, we focus on enrichment activities provided for students, drawing primarily from surveys of teachers, surveys of 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, as well as interviews with principals, in 17 ELT and 19 matched comparison schools that participated in the ELT evaluation during the 2010-2011 school year.

For the purposes of this brief, enrichment activities are defined as distinct class sessions or supplemental activities that are woven into traditional core academic courses. One helpful way to think of enrichment is an opportunity for student choice, as all students will likely attend *some* enrichment class(es) within their respective schools, yet not all students necessarily attend the *same* enrichment class(es). We learned that ELT schools use a variety of names for their enrichment activities.

**What is enrichment?** Enrichment refers to classes distinct from core academic subjects (i.e., English Language Arts (ELA), math, science, social studies) and above and beyond typical non-academic offerings such as art and physical education. Enrichment classes represent an important component of the ELT model, yet other schools—not just ELT schools—offer such additional learning opportunities to their students. This brief provides district and school leaders with information about the strategies used by some schools with expanded schedules to provide enrichment to students.

## ABOUT THE ELT INITIATIVE

ELT schools in Massachusetts receive state-funded grants from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to expand their school year by at least 300 hours. The additional time represents about eight additional hours a week, on average, for core academics, academic support for students, and common planning time for teachers, as well as time for student enrichment in core academic classes and/or in enrichment classes. Participating ELT schools receive an additional \$1,300 per pupil per academic year to implement a redesigned and expanded schedule.

Well-designed enrichment opportunities, according to the policy, advocacy, and technical assistance organization National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL), should connect to state academic standards and help develop students' skills and interests while increasing students' engagement in school.<sup>iii</sup>

Such activities can also help students build self-confidence and gain "21st century skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, public speaking, and the ability to communicate ideas clearly."<sup>iv</sup> For students who may not have many extra-curricular opportunities outside of school and those who may benefit from different learning settings, enrichment during the school day can provide valuable opportunities for student growth and engagement. According to NCTL, "low-income students, in particular, need exposure in school to a rich array of topics, skills, and knowledge, because they are less likely than their more affluent peers to receive this exposure at home or through extracurricular activities pursued outside of school."<sup>v</sup>

## STRATEGIES FOR OFFERING ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

### Time for Enrichment

Almost all ELT schools implemented separate enrichment classes, often called electives, in which nearly all students participated. Some schools also embedded enrichment activities within core academic classes. Both the frequency and length of enrichment classes for a typical student varied tremendously across and even within the study's schools: the average amount was about 30 minutes each day. Time for enrichment at ELT schools during 2010-11 ranged from 0 to 340 minutes per week. Two schools offered no time at all for enrichment, and eight others offered about an hour per day.

Generally, middle school students spent more time in enrichment classes than elementary students. Within a single school, the amount of time a student spent in enrichment sometimes depended on academic performance.

- ELT schools offered an average of 30 minutes a day of stand-alone enrichment activities, or about 2.5 hours/week.
- Enrichment classes were generally taught by regular teachers in each school, although community partners taught some enrichment classes in about half of the ELT schools.
- Overall, enrichment was perceived as valuable by teachers.

### Content

Enrichment class content was generally connected to grade level standards and/or curriculum frameworks and covered both academic and non-academic content. Examples of course content included dance, drama, puppetry, knitting, African drumming, woodworking, mask making, jewelry making, and rock band. Some schools offered courses focused on math and science: robotics, ocean life, astronomy, engineering, architecture, and the stock market. Other schools also offered different kinds of physical education such as swimming, basketball, lacrosse, soccer, and fitness/wellness.

### Staffing

Schools used different approaches for staffing enrichment time. Approximately half of ELT teachers reported that they taught at least one enrichment activity, and more middle school teachers reported leading enrichment activities than their elementary counterparts.

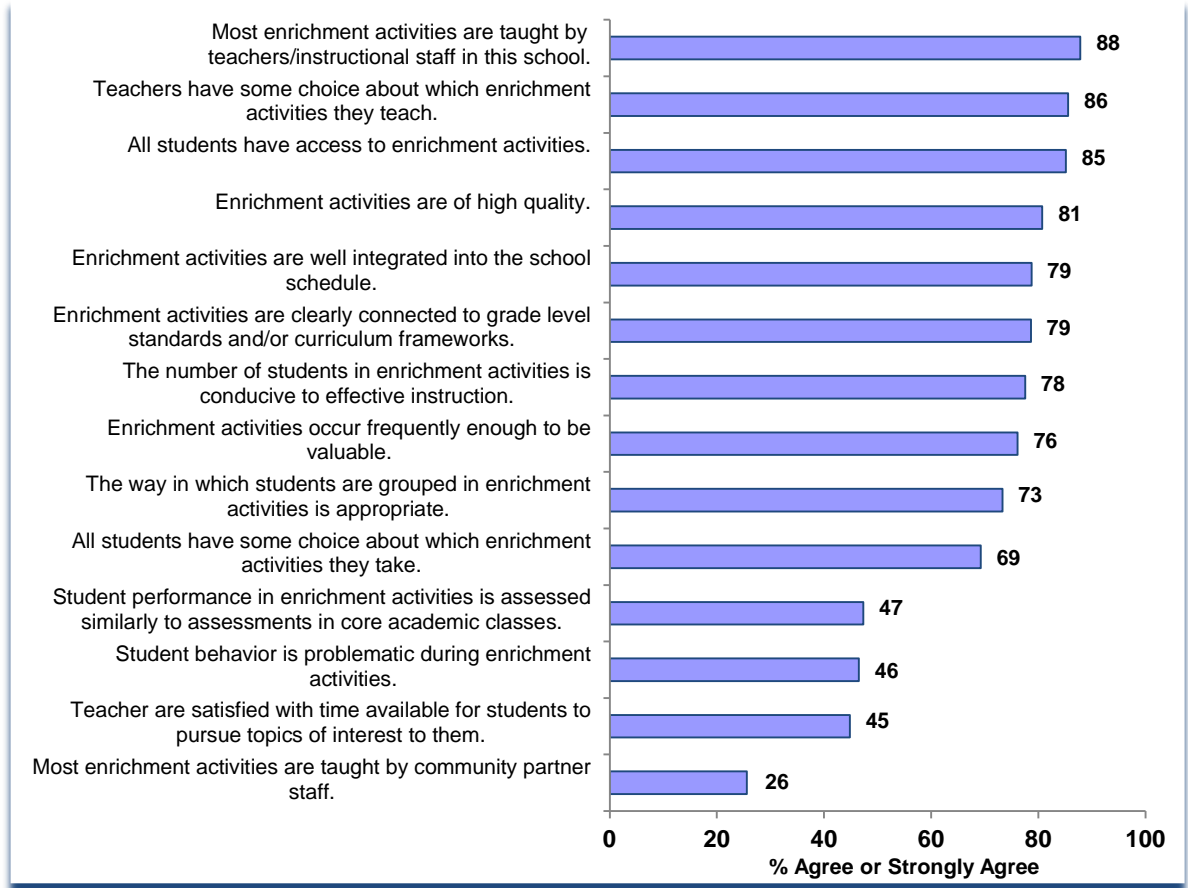
Many schools partnered with outside organizations to lead enrichment activities. More than half of ELT schools reported that they held regularly scheduled meetings in order to help integrate partners into the ongoing school day. As schools and partners became more experienced with ELT and enrichment in their schools, principals and teachers reported that it seemed easier for partner staff to be integrated into the school community.

One example of enrichment is an elementary school's Blip-Blip Submarines course led by a science teacher. The course used hands-on learning, and the teacher connected the course content to history and to science. In one lesson observed by the study team, the topics ranged from a study of historical submersibles, the engineering of a Cartesian diver, and an experiment that involved changing single variables in each diver's environment and making hypotheses about the consequences of each change. The course included connections to inquiry, technology, reading comprehension, fiction, and writing composition.

### Educator Perceptions

More than three-quarters of teachers in ELT schools reported that enrichment activities were of high quality, occurred frequently enough to be valuable, and were available to all students. The exhibit below summarizes teachers' perceptions about different facets of enrichment activities.

**Teacher Perceptions of Enrichment in ELT Schools, 2010-11**



**KEY THEME: ENRICHMENT OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Community partners played a significant role in providing purposefully varied enrichment opportunities at many schools. Partners often have specialized expertise that school staff may not be able to offer. Among the ELT partners are New England Scores (soccer), Tenacity (tennis), YMCA (fitness & swimming), CityStep (dance), Young Audiences (drama and visual arts), Ecotarium (science & nature), and City Sprouts (gardening), all of whom helped to staff stand-alone enrichment classes.

Successful partnerships require strong communication and integration. In some ELT schools, partners were initially unaccustomed to school-specific goals and teaching or disciplinary norms, and had different experiences with managing student behavior. We learned about many creative solutions developed by ELT schools to address this situation: some schools held orientation and training sessions for partner and school staff to communicate and clarify policies and expectations, while others made sure that someone from the school staff was also present when partner organization staff were leading enrichment activities. Other schools integrated

partners by embedding enrichment activities into core academic classes or specials. For example, in one

elementary school, a partner staff member joined physical education classes once a week to provide leadership training and encourage teamwork, conflict resolution, and bullying prevention. This school also partnered with nearby colleges/universities for embedded enrichment, and representatives from one university came to help students with science activities. Moreover, other schools fostered strong integration by offering office space to partner staff when they were in their school building.

### **KEY THEME: ENRICHMENT FOSTERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAFF AND STUDENT CHOICE**

Schools used a variety of approaches to choosing which enrichment topics to offer and in assigning students and teachers to specific enrichment activities. The large majority of teachers (85%) reported that they had some choice about which activities they would teach. Typically, teachers submitted their proposals or lesson plans to the principal and/or another administrative staff for approval; these plans outlined how the proposed courses connected to grade-level standards or curriculum frameworks.

At some schools, students were invited to nominate ideas for enrichment, and at some others, students could select the specific enrichment courses they attended. One school produced a brochure listing enrichment options, and students were invited to pick their top few choices. Another middle school organized an enrichment fair in the cafeteria; students gathered to review the range of choices among elective courses, each of which was represented at a designated table. Students submitted their first and second choices after visiting the various tables.

To encourage informed decision making, as well as to provide students with opportunities to showcase their work in upcoming semesters or quarters, some schools created an end-of-course enrichment showcase or fair. For example, several schools described hosting all-school assemblies for students to demonstrate what they learned in enrichment. Others had students create posters or other displays for the hallways to share.

At one elementary school, enrichment classes culminated with a gallery walk in which students traveled from class to class in order to view peers' work. This type of showcase both helped students decide which enrichment class(es) they may want to try next and motivates culminating projects that can be used for student assessment.

The primary strategy used by one ELT middle school was to work with a community partner organization to provide academic support and enrichment opportunities. This organization was responsible for all enrichment and academic support instruction for the school's 6<sup>th</sup> grade; it oversaw additional community partners and volunteers who led small-group enrichment activities. The partnership focused specifically on 6<sup>th</sup> grade so that teachers could provide additional academic support to older grade levels; this staffing model meant that the class size was more manageable for teachers and helped to improve the focus of academic support in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

### **Additional Ideas: Enrichment at Comparison Schools**

Four of 19 matched comparison (non-ELT) schools offered at least 45 minutes of enrichment activities for students throughout the year.

At one (non-ELT) middle school, students were regularly offered electives such as drama, science club, bicycle repair, 3-D animation, and arts and crafts. Teachers decided what they wanted to teach and proposed classes—and unpopular options were not offered a second time. Each quarter, students received a brochure describing the elective options. All students at this middle school participated in electives, and each elective course met twice a week for 90 minutes. Students received academic support on the other three days. Both enrichment and academic support were taught by the school's teachers. At this school, the school day was seven hours long, which is longer than the average school day across comparison schools.

At another comparison middle school, students took two electives every semester. The school had a rotating, 10-day block schedule, including electives, with four blocks each day. Each day, three of the four blocks were dedicated to ELA, math, and either science or social studies, and the fourth block was for electives. Students took science for one semester and social studies for one semester each year. One elective was designated for students' "major" (an area that students would like to study more deeply) and the second was for students' "minor." Students chose their majors at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade that they generally kept through 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, although they could change minors each semester. The school was committed to offering majors on a long-term basis, and minor offerings changed more frequently. Assignment to elective courses was based on student choice. Students received a list of course options to bring home to their parents and rank their top choices. All students participated in electives, and courses were related to arts, sciences, or physical education (PE).

### **KEY THEME: ENRICHMENT CAN BE SCHEDULED AND STRUCTURED BASED ON ACADEMIC NEED**

When designing their enrichment activities and schedules, schools made decisions about whether participation in enrichment is universal or targeted to particular subgroups of students with certain needs or interests. Almost all students at ELT schools participated in some form of enrichment; however, at nine of the ELT schools, students who required more academic support participated less frequently than those whose academic performance was at or above grade level.

Schools also varied in terms of when in the day they offered enrichment. Some schools scheduled enrichment classes only at the very end of the day. One ELT middle school used an "ELT block," a double period that rotated through different time slots each day of the week, so ELT might occur during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> period on one day, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> periods the next day, and so on. In this school, students who performed well on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) had enrichment, or electives, during this block every day and could participate in multiple elective classes since each elective met one or more days per week. Students whose MCAS performance was below grade level participated in English Language Arts (ELA) or math remediation during the ELT block, up to four days per week, and, depending upon the intensity of remediation, could participate in one or possibly more elective classes.

The types of variation in school schedules ranged considerably. At one school, students who performed below grade level on the MCAS had enrichment on Monday for the full double period, a combination of academic support and enrichment on Tuesday, and academic support on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. At another school, all students participated in one daily enrichment class, and two-thirds of the students participated in two daily enrichment classes, while the remaining third of students spent an additional period receiving extra help on content mastery and were guaranteed their first choice elective since they received less enrichment than students

whose academic performance was at or above grade level. At a third school, students whose MCAS scores indicated a need for extra support received four periods of content “strategies” (either ELA or Math) each week. During these blocks, students who were proficient on MCAS participated in enrichment classes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The decision to integrate enrichment into the school day carries with it both questions and challenges about the most effective ways to implement substantial structural—and sometimes curricular—reforms. Schools need to make decisions about staffing, voluntary or required student and teacher participation, and scheduling, among other factors, as they consider the necessary elements of implementing enrichment activities.

Over the course of the ELT initiative, our study found that teachers had increasingly positive views about the value of enrichment. The majority of teachers at ELT schools reported that enrichment opportunities were valuable to students, well integrated into the school day, and of high quality. Most teachers also reported that enrichment was clearly connected to curriculum frameworks or standards. Almost all students at ELT schools were able to participate in at least some enrichment, regardless of academic standing. Enrichment also offered schools the opportunity to develop community partnerships and offered students choice about a portion of their schedules.

ELT principals noted that providing students with enrichment opportunities was worthwhile. One principal emphasized the importance of a well-rounded education and noticed that ELT seemed to positively affect school culture. Another principal noted that enrichment activities provided students exposure to new experiences that would not be available to them otherwise. Enrichment may be especially valuable in school communities where students typically do not have the opportunity to participate in extra activities outside of school.



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<sup>i</sup> This brief was prepared by Meghan Caven, Amy Checkoway, Beth Gamse, Rachel Luck, and Sally Wu of Abt Associates Inc.

<sup>ii</sup> Information presented in this brief is from a multi-year study conducted by Abt Associates Inc. that examined both implementation and outcomes of the ELT initiative; please see a comprehensive report at: <http://abtassociates.com/Reports/2012/-ELT-Year-5-Final-Report.aspx>.

<sup>iii</sup> *ELT Expectations for Implementation*, Mass 2020 website: <http://www.mass2020.org/node/14> Retrieved 11/19/12.

<sup>iv</sup> *Making Time for Enrichment*, Mass 2020 website: <http://www.mass2020.org/node/74> Retrieved 11/20/12.

<sup>v</sup> *Use Time to Provide a Well Rounded Education*, NCTL website: [http://www.timeandlearning.org/files/TWS\\_Use\\_Time\\_to\\_Provide\\_a\\_Well-Rounded\\_Education.pdf](http://www.timeandlearning.org/files/TWS_Use_Time_to_Provide_a_Well-Rounded_Education.pdf) Retrieved 12/17/12