



## Increasing Time and Enriching Learning for Greater Equity in Schools: Perspective from Two Community Funders

JANET LOPEZ AND PETER RIVERA

*More and better learning time funders in Denver and Los Angeles find that strategic investments can leverage community-wide change and lead to more equitable outcomes for young people.*

Foundations across the country engage in grantmaking to eliminate the opportunity and achievement gaps in K–12 public schools. Many of the strategies and investments that funders have supported in recent years focus not only on *more time* but also on *better use of time* in schools. This better use of time centers on outcomes for students but also has substantial benefits to educators and staff who work with students.

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Improving educational outcomes for youth is nuanced; any efforts to do so involve improving various in-school and out-of-school variables. In this article, two funders, from the California Community Foundation in Los Angeles and the Rose Community Foundation in Denver, share their perspectives on how they support an equity agenda in K–12 public schools in their cities, with an eye to a more and better learning time agenda.

**Q Why is time a lever for equity for your foundation?**

**A** *Janet Lopez:* If you were to walk into my office you’d see a life-size portrait that might surprise you. The portrait is World War II General Maurice Rose. Rose Community Foundation was the namesake for the Rose Hospital, the institution whose sale created our community foundation. What you might not gain from this portrait is that the Foundation is driven by Jewish-inspired principles – a commitment to philanthropy, social justice, and non-discrimination. These values shape our program areas, including the education portfolio, which focuses on educator effectiveness and systemic change in K–12 public education to eliminate the achievement gap in Metro Denver’s public schools.

In 2013, we began researching and exploring time as a lever for equity within the systemic change priority of our education portfolio. In Colorado, the “Colorado Paradox” – the fact that Colorado has one of the highest number of college degrees per capita, but only one in five Colorado ninth-graders (and even fewer students of color and students in poverty) will earn a college degree – pushes us to continue our work in the area of systemic change and to grow our focus on more and better learning time strategies. Research demonstrates that additional time and better use of that time helps

students who have traditionally been under-served by the current education system (Bodilly & Beckett 2005; Del Razo & Renée 2013; Del Razo et al. 2014; Duffett et al. 2004; Farbman & Kaplan 2005; Farbman 2012).

*Peter Rivera:* In the city of Los Angeles, the estimated median family income is \$46,803 – only slightly above the income below which a family of four qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch – compared with the estimated median income in one of Los Angeles’s affluent suburbs, La Canada Flintridge, of \$148,996.<sup>1</sup> Last July, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story detailing how students in Beverly Hills, La Canada Flintridge, and Arcadia paid in excess of \$700 to take history, Spanish, and creative writing courses during the summer months (Ceasar 2014). In contrast, the majority of students serviced by the Los Angeles Unified School District qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and do not have access to enriching summer school courses; in some instances, they are fortunate to have access to remedial classes. The income disparities in a county as large as Los Angeles directly correlate to the inequity in educational opportunities for students in Los Angeles.

I believe that time is our most valuable and irreplaceable resource. What we choose to do with our time cannot be replaced or taken back. In a community as vast and diverse as Los Angeles County, some of our youth, whether it be once the final school bell rings in the afternoon or during the long summer months, do not have the opportunity to make choices with their time. Providing all students with access to more and better learning time is a need we recognize and a challenge we must embrace if we want to improve educational outcomes for all students.

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<sup>1</sup> Free or reduced-price lunch is often used as an indicator of poverty.

**Q** How do you begin a relationship or discussion about whether a school, district, or organization’s work are a “fit” for the more and better learning time focus at your foundation?

**A** *Janet Lopez:* Realistically, the need to support systemic change across Metro Denver far outweighs the resources our foundation has to support the effort. The focus on more and better learning time is one way to prioritize what we invest in regarding systemic change, but even this focus must have narrowed priorities. Colorado’s support for public education (per pupil funding) ranks forty-third out of fifty states and the District of Columbia. This means that public schools must operate within the restraints of an education reform system that demands implementation of many important and critical reforms, but does so with limited resources to support those changes. In many cases, a Rose Community Foundation grant will support a school, district, organization, or the state for a year, but these additional dollars will not be permanently infused in the organization’s budget. The goals of our grants are to build capacity, cause the “system” to be fundamentally different after the investment, and, as a result, achieve better academic achievement outcomes for students.

The best grant proposals are developed in partnership with the educators and leaders of a school or district community. Recently, I worked on a grant with Grant Beacon Middle School.<sup>2</sup> For the last three years Grant Beacon has added additional time to the school day for academic interventions and enrichment opportunities for its 80 percent free or reduced-price lunch student population. The additional time is a benefit for the students, but also for the teachers, who have

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<sup>2</sup> See [rcfdenver.org/content/stories-impact-grant-beacon-middle-school-success-story-k-12-school-innovation](http://rcfdenver.org/content/stories-impact-grant-beacon-middle-school-success-story-k-12-school-innovation).

additional planning and collaboration capacity. The extended day also gives teachers the focused time they need for individual student support. Teacher Jacob benEzra says,

If a student is struggling, we put them in an intervention class where it affords teachers one-on-one time to provide real interventions that are having a noticeable impact.

The results have been impressive. In three years, the school has moved from the district’s school performance ranking of “on watch” to “meets expectations,” attendance rates rose by 2 percent, and suspensions decreased by 110 percent. Grant Beacon saw proficiency gains and strong growth in all core subject areas in 2013, including a four-percentage-point gain in math.

But the school wants even more for their students, so with our grant dollars they have begun the process of integrating the Colorado Academic Standards into the curriculum of their enrichment activities and integrating the enrichment curriculum (much of which focuses on social and emotional learning components) into their academic content departments. Together, we crafted a grant proposal that focuses on the added capacity we can bring to this particular school and also the added capacity this work can bring and demonstrate as best practice to other schools. This proposal is a stellar example of “fit” for the more and better learning time portfolio on a number of criteria, including input and buy-in from teachers and community, increasing access to and quality of learning, connecting changes in the school to overall academic achievement gains for students, and creating a plan for long-term sustainability, given the limited resources of the public school system.

It is also important to note that the relationship between the grantee and our foundation is not one-sided. Two years ago I approached a local school district, Jeffco Public Schools, which had invested in several teacher-driven design models to support more and better learning time in their schools. The superintendent had invested additional resources at the district level to implement pilots in six schools. My initial reaction was to see whether the schools with high levels of poverty needed additional resources. The superintendent shared that one of the best ways to continue to support these changes at a systemic level was to make sure a valid and reliable evaluation of the programs was conducted. The resources to take this important step were missing.

While it was not the request I anticipated funding, I wanted to listen and be responsive to the district's needs, so instead we supported an evaluation of the pilot programs. And the results a year later unequivocally demonstrated that the Jeffco public schools that were implementing more and better learning time practices not only saw academic achievement gains for their students, but also saw positive outcomes for teacher effectiveness, better use of instructional time, and higher levels of student engagement.<sup>3</sup> The evaluation made a compelling case to continue the practices at the school level and to continue the investment at the district level, and it also serves as a demonstration that these practices work when implemented with fidelity in conversations with other districts.

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3 See [rcfdenver.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ELOFinalReport2014.pdf](http://rcfdenver.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ELOFinalReport2014.pdf).  
4 For more on InnerCity Struggle, see Henry Perez and Perla Madera's article in this issue of *VUE* and [innercitystruggle.org](http://innercitystruggle.org).  
5 See [cocosouthla.org](http://cocosouthla.org) for information on Community Coalition. For a report on Community Coalition's campaign to increase student access to college preparatory coursework, see [annenberginstitute.org/pdf/Mott\\_LA.pdf](http://annenberginstitute.org/pdf/Mott_LA.pdf).

*Peter Rivera:* Our more and better learning time work has been focused within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). In a system as large and complex as LAUSD – in the 2014-2015 school year LAUSD will have a \$12 billion dollar budget – it might appear daunting for philanthropy to enter and create a focus on more and better learning time. But we have been fortunate that the conditions in Los Angeles have allowed us to make a meaningful impact through our investment in this approach. The strong presence of community organizers in the city creates the demand for the needs of our youth to be better serviced by LAUSD. InnerCity Struggle<sup>4</sup> and Community Coalition have advocated for access to college prep curriculum for all students,<sup>5</sup> for school choice, and for the elimination of “willful defiance” as a way to suspend students. Our community organizers have the pulse of their local communities, understand what our communities want in their schools, and mobilize students and parents to advocate for these changes. Any conversation about school reforms and what can be accomplished in Los Angeles begins with determining with community organizers whether it's a strategy important to communities.

The new school funding formula in California called Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) also presents an opportunity to better service students in Los Angeles. LCFF creates a base level of funding for students across California; additional funding goes to low-income students, English language learners, and foster youth. LCFF has created an equitable funding formula for students across California. Lastly, LCFF increases local school districts' ability to make funding allocations based on local needs. In theory, LCFF is an opportunity to allocate more resources to our neediest students and push these resources and

decisions to school sites. LCFF presents an equity opportunity for all students in California, and now is the appropriate time to take advantage of this opportunity and create systems to create equitable funding distribution.

In Los Angeles we have looked at two approaches for more and better learning time, Linked Learning<sup>6</sup> and community schools.<sup>7</sup> These two approaches are different from each other, but both offer students expanded learning opportunities. In partnership with the James Irvine Foundation, ConnectEd, and Center for Powerful Public Schools, we have created a comprehensive effort to implement the academic rigors and external learning features of Linked Learning. This summer I had the privilege of visiting the STEM Academy at the Helen Bernstein High School. Incoming freshmen were being exposed to the engineering and biomedical sciences curriculum, incoming juniors and seniors were being trained to mentor the incoming freshmen, and incoming seniors were given an opportunity to intern with Kaiser Permanente (a large California health care provider).

By strategically allocating facility bond dollars we have also expanded the community schools footprint in LAUSD. Community clinics have been brought onto high school campuses across the city. These clinics, along with the coordination of nonprofit partners providing services on these campuses, have allowed us to fully utilize the campuses and extend learning opportunities for youth. Organizations like Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP) work intensively to coordinate the

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6 See [linkedlearning.org](http://linkedlearning.org).

7 For more on community schools, see Natasha Capers and Shital Shah's article in this issue of *VUE* and [communityschools.org](http://communityschools.org).

8 For more on LAEP's work in Los Angeles, see Henry Perez and Perla Madera's article in this issue of *VUE* and [laep.org](http://laep.org).

services and programs provided to students. They are also working with teaching staff to integrate learning opportunities for students outside of the traditional school schedule.<sup>8</sup>

In a school system as large and complex as LAUSD it can be easy to focus on the negative press and the challenges with the system. It's easy to overlook that there are extraordinary students, parents, teachers, principals, district administrators, community partners, and business partners working extremely hard together to improve the lives of youth in our city. This hard work is sowing the seeds of what is possible in LAUSD and is changing how the system services youth in our most challenging communities. Improving the lives and outcomes for Los Angeles's most vulnerable and underprivileged population is at the heart of our foundation's mission.

**Q** What are the non-negotiable outcomes you need to see in advance of supporting a grant for more and better learning time?

**A** *Janet Lopez:* Measuring outcomes in a new area of investment (we've invested in more and better learning time for less than five years) means a balance between asking a partner to share specific outcome goals and accepting a certain level of risk to support promising practices in a new field. At our foundation, the systemic change priority must be linked to eliminating the achievement gap. We look for concrete connections to evidence-based practices that act at a system level to increase academic achievement for students living in poverty and students from communities of color. Our work focuses on schools and districts that serve large numbers of students from ethnically diverse and low-income communities.

We also focus on investments that will be sustainable beyond our investment. We've had to turn down and shy away

from some great ideas to implement more and better learning time in an entire school or district when we realized that the price tag to implement would not be sustainable in the long term. We've been excited when a school or organization like Generation Schools<sup>9</sup> can think differently about the school day and year to improve student academic outcomes, give teachers more time to collaborate, and work within a district-run union contract. We are willing to take some level of risk with these new investments, but if the rationale for supporting academic achievement gains isn't strong, our foundation can't make the investment.

*Peter Rivera:* At CCF we work within the construct that all reforms must be done *with* a community, not *to* a community. The non-negotiable outcome we need to see in advance of supporting a grant for more and better learning time is true community engagement. Community engagement is the only means with which we can ensure the sustainability of more and better learning time strategies. Leadership at the district and school-site level can frequently change, but where there is true community engagement the strategies to address equity and student outcomes remain consistent. Community and parent engagement should exist before a grant is made and should continue beyond the grant period. Similarly to my colleague at the Rose Foundation, CCF is focused on serving the most vulnerable populations and focused on sustainability. We look for efforts that seek to transform our most chronically underperforming schools, and we look to ensure that sustainability exists beyond the initial grant.

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9 See [generationschools.org](http://generationschools.org).

10 See [timeforequity.org](http://timeforequity.org).

**Q** Going beyond evaluating individual grantees, how do you measure the impact of your whole investment portfolio on equity and practice in the field?

**A** *Janet Lopez:* From a very basic standpoint, our grantees fill out an outcomes template that looks at outputs, activities, outcomes, and tools to measure those outcomes. This helps us understand the basic deliverables from the investment at an individual grant level. Measuring whether the larger portfolio of work and multiple investments are creating more equity is a much harder nut to crack and an issue that many foundations are wrestling with as they try to measure their larger portfolio of work in the aggregate. Questions we can continue to ask include: How much time does a school or district need to see these changes make a meaningful difference for kids? Have we attended to all parts of the ecosystem that need support for this work to be successful?

At Rose Community Foundation, we've focused on investments in parent and family engagement, teacher engagement, policy-level changes, and promising models and practices. We've relied on partners to invest in research. Promising new tools like the Time for Equity Indicators tools<sup>10</sup> from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform are helping us consider the additional ways in which we can measure whether schools are achieving equity and whether our overall portfolio is making a significant difference.

*Peter Rivera:* At the very core of my beliefs about how to measure impact is to see if we've changed the trajectory for youth in our community. I had the privilege of working with Superintendent Dr. Carl Cohn in Long Beach and San Diego Unified and once, during a contentious debate over the placement of a truancy center, Dr. Cohn said he wore it as a badge of honor when he influenced saving the life of one

youngster. All too often we get caught up in the metrics of measuring impact, but sometimes we forget that the impact on one youngster can be priceless. With our more and better learning time work we are also using the Annenberg Institute's Time for Equity Indicators tools to measure whether schools are achieving equity and whether our overall portfolio is making a significant difference. While these tools are necessary and important, I will never forget the true measure of our impact can sometimes be unseen or is sometimes told in the priceless trajectory of one youngster.

**Q Is it possible to scale promising practices around more and better learning time and equity?**

**A** *Janet Lopez:* This question touches on one of the biggest challenges of any education funder's investments in what's working: Is it possible to scale a great school or great organization into an entire district or state-level practice? This requires much larger buy-in from leadership, teachers, and the community or region of the city, or at large scale, an entire school district. It may also require that the whole ecosystem of education stakeholders in a community allocate resources differently. Hard questions like, What does a district need to stop funding in order to start funding more and better learning time? or Does this fit into the larger vision of whole-school redesign? need to be answered.

Leadership in a district must be willing, as a result of seeing positive impact, to make a great practice in one school a part of their larger priorities for district-level improvement. For Rose Community Foundation, similar to our colleagues at the California Community Foundation, when we see the children in low-performing schools making great academic achievement gains and becoming well prepared for college and career, that is the true

litmus test of when we are willing to continue to ask such hard questions and push for the system to adopt what works. This is not only our continued commitment to equity in Metro Denver, but also a larger commitment to addressing a life's work that General Rose reminds me of each day, of our values to make sure that every child succeeds.

*Peter Rivera:* In California, we are uniquely positioned to scale promising practices that are important to our communities. The premise of LCFF is that funding decisions are pushed down to the local level and should be pushed to school sites. If more and better learning time practices are having an impact and properly addressing the equity issues, they will be scaled, and LCFF provides the avenue to scale these practices.

Our Linked Learning work in Los Angeles provides an example of scaling in a school district. We currently have thirty-seven Linked Learning pathways in schools throughout LAUSD and there is dedicated staff in the central office supporting the implementation of these pathways. Our experience in Los Angeles started organically with a small number of schools and once other schools were interested and wanted to follow suit we saw a need to have central office staff that could support the growing demand. LCFF funded the position, which is now funded by the district. This is how we try to leverage our investment to increase capacity, which can then be sustained by the grantees.

Similarly to my colleague at the Rose Community Foundation I believe these practices require larger community buy-in, which provides the commitment to the practice and the commitment to success. Our work in Los Angeles has been to create evidence that can provide templates for success. We recognize that these are only

templates and there is no cookie-cutter approach to making schools better. If we can lift the elements of success and show what is possible, we create the means for people to scale promising practices.

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