



A Race Against the Clock

The Value of Expanded Learning Time for English Language Learners

Melissa Lazarín December 2008

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Introduction

Time is of the essence for children learning English. Kindergarten English language learners enter school with a vocabulary of 5,000 English words fewer than their native English-speaking peers.¹ ELLs must not only learn a new language; they must keep pace with their English-proficient classmates who are continuing to rapidly grow their vocabulary and further develop their already advanced literacy skills. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of English language learners are citizens by birth or naturalization² and begin their education in U.S. schools, but for those newcomers who enter the U.S. school system in later grades, time and the constraints of the traditional school day pose a particularly serious challenge.

Expanded learning time, a schoolwide strategy that entails redesigning and lengthening the school day and/or year to help support teaching and learning for all students, can be particularly beneficial for ELLs. Current efforts to promote the expansion of learning time suggest increasing the school day by two hours or lengthening the year by 360 hours—the equivalent of at least 30 percent more learning time. This additional time can be pivotal in closing both the academic and language gap for ELLs.

Time plays a unique role in the educational career of the English language learner. Time affects the facility of learning a new language and the likelihood of high school graduation, especially among immigrant ELLs in high school. This report reviews some of the relevant research findings as well as examples of existing initiatives that include this population. Surprisingly, only limited research examines the effect of expanded learning opportunities, including after-school programs, on English language learners' educational success. Additional research is clearly needed given the growing presence of this population in our schools. The little evidence that does exist suggests that English learners have much to benefit from expanded learning time. And schools and districts that have incorporated more academic learning time appear to confirm these research findings.

While expanded learning time initiatives appear to hold significant promise for English language learners, it is important to have whole-school implementation. Unless all students in a school are involved, redesigning the school schedule to maximize the opportunities of additional time is unlikely and success will be limited. Both the research and schools' experience incorporating expanded learning time suggest that more time is a necessity for ELLs, but all students benefit from expanded learning time.

Expanded learning time defined

No single definition of expanded learning time exists. The term has traditionally been used to describe a variety of out-of-school programs and activities, ranging from after-school programs to summer school. As policymakers and educators alike increasingly focus greater attention on the role of time in learning and instruction, a universal definition of expanded learning time is needed.

The Center for American Progress, with the National Center on Time & Learning, has shaped a common definition for expanded learning time. According to the center, expanded learning time initiatives encompass the following eight guiding principles:³

- Expansion of learning time should be significant; increasing the school day, week, or year by at least 30 percent, or the equivalent of approximately two hours per day or 360 hours per year is recommended.
- Expanded learning time should be implemented as a schoolwide strategy, where all students in a school participate.
- Schools must be the focus of reform, where the additional time is targeted to redesigning time within the school calendar.
- Expanded learning time should not add more of the same; it involves redesigning the school day and a thoughtful re-examination of the school schedule.
- Low-income schools must be the focus of initiatives to expand learning time.
- Schools should opt to participate, rather than be forced; strong leadership and staff will recognize expanded time as an opportunity worth pursuing.
- Additional time must prioritize academic learning time, as well as enrichment activities and opportunities for professional development and planning for teachers.

This report will examine the role that time plays in their education and learning, and how the expansion of learning time can be a key strategy in improving educational outcomes for ELLs. Some schools and districts have already begun to recognize the valuable role that time can play in educating students who are learning English and are now offering before-, after-, or summer school learning opportunities to this population. This report will highlight some of these examples, providing insight into how a few districts and schools are approaching expanded learning opportunities for ELLs and lessons learned in the process.

Why should schools consider expanding learning time for English learners?

There are over 5 million English language learners in grades PK-12, which comprises more than 10 percent of total public school enrollment.⁴ They are concentrated in urban and predominantly minority and low-income districts;⁵ in primary grades K-6; and in “traditional” immigrant states such as California and Texas, though the greatest growth is occurring in the Southeast and Midwest.⁶ ELLs also make up a significant proportion (39 percent) of the second-largest student population subgroup—Latinos⁷—underscoring the increasing effect that their academic outcomes will have on our progressively more diverse education system. Moreover, the No Child Left Behind Act’s disaggregation and accountability provisions have underscored the significance of ELL achievement outcomes in evaluating a school’s success.

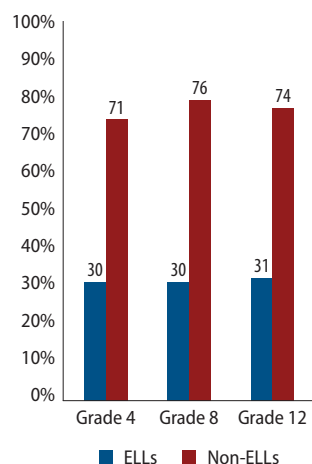
It is discouraging to observe the persistently low educational outcomes among English language learners year after year. The gaps between ELLs and their peers have become increasingly evident over time, yet the solutions to closing the gap between these students and their English-proficient peers are less obvious. Complicating matters further is the continuing debate concerning the type of language instruction that best ensures English language proficiency. This is an important issue, but other academic interventions must be considered to support ELLs’ improved instruction. Expanding learning time is one such strategy that holds considerable promise for English learners.

Academic outcomes among English language learners are persistently low

The large academic gap between ELLs and non-ELLs indicates that there is a clear need to explore innovative instructional strategies for English language learners. The academic achievement gap between ELLs and their English-fluent peers has been well documented. Only 30 percent of fourth-grade ELLs are “at or above basic” in reading compared to 71 percent of non-ELLs, according to the 2007 National Assessment for Educational Progress.⁸ The gap is slightly larger among eighth-graders. Similar double-digit gaps are prevalent in math, though slightly smaller among students in grade four.⁹ The gaps remain relatively unchanged among high school students, and achievement levels are even lower across all students.¹⁰

The reading achievement gap

Percentage of ELL and non-ELL students scoring at or above basic on the National Assessment for Education Progress in reading



ELL students lag behind their peers on other educational outcomes as well. National data on graduation rates among ELLs is limited, but states with large English language learner populations report dismal results. For example, only 25 to 30 percent of ELLs in New York graduate within four years of entering high school, compared to 71 percent of non-ELLs.¹¹ Graduation rates among this population jump to 38 and 44 percent with an additional one to two years of schooling, and *former* ELLs, who have exited out of the limited-English-proficient category and attained English language proficiency according to the state, have even higher graduation rates than their native-English peers (74 percent).¹²

The No Child Left Behind Act sets higher expectations with more consequences

The No Child Left Behind Act has undoubtedly raised the stakes for many schools seeking to increase achievement gains for English learners. Under NCLB, students learning English have received unprecedented attention. Although previous iterations of the federal law required states to include ELLs in statewide assessments and accountability systems, NCLB tightened accountability measures to close the academic achievement gap across various groups of students, including between ELLs and their peers.

Educators, under pressure to ensure that ELLs meet the same academic standards as all other students, are searching for innovative strategies to improve academic outcomes among this population of students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, schools and districts with higher concentrations of ELLs are slightly more likely to be identified for school improvement.¹³ Yet 4 percent of schools failed to make adequate yearly progress, or AYP—the state-defined measure used to hold schools accountable for student academic achievement under NCLB—due to ELLs only,¹⁴ which indicates that schoolwide reform measures are needed.

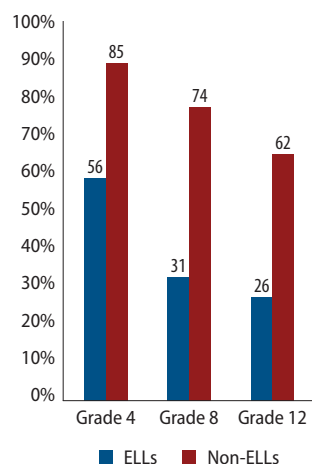
Expanded learning can be a useful strategy in supporting a school's goal of making AYP. It not only offers English language learners more time to master academic content and the English language; it also ensures that non-ELLs get the additional academic support that they need to meet their academic benchmarks, therefore enhancing the performance of *all* students in the school.

ELLs have less time to cover academic material

Experimenting with the use of time is an obvious strategy given the unique role that time plays in an English language learner's educational career. ELLs have more to learn—core academic content and the English language—yet have the same amount of time, or even less, than their native English-speaking peers in which to learn it. For example, instructional practices for English language development among ELLs often involve pulling

The mathematics achievement gap

Percentage of ELL and non-ELL students scoring at or above basic on the National Assessment for Education Progress in mathematics



students out of their regular classes to focus on English proficiency, resulting in less exposure to core academic content. Immigrant ELLs who enter the U.S. school system after kindergarten undercredited or under grade level have even less time to catch up with their peers academically and learn English. This is particularly concerning for “late-arrival” immigrants who begin their education in American schools at the ninth grade or above.

Quick facts about English language learners

Population

- During the 2005-06 school year, 5,074,572 English language learners were enrolled in PK-12 schools, making up 10 percent of all students in public schools.
- The largest numbers of English learners reside in California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois.
- The states with the fastest growth of English language learner students are in the South and Midwest: South Carolina, Arkansas, Indiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Achievement

- On average, only a third of English language learners in grades 4, 8, and 12 perform at or above basic in reading and math, according to the National Assessment for Education Progress.
- According to graduate rate data in New York, 25 to 30 percent of ELLs graduate within four years, 38 to 41 percent within five years, and 44 percent within six years. Former English learners have even higher graduation rates than their native-English peers (74 percent compared to 71 percent).
- Only 4 percent of schools failed to make adequate yearly progress due to their English language learner population alone.

Language

- English learners enter kindergarten knowing 5,000 fewer English language vocabulary words.
- Nearly 80 percent of English learners are native Spanish speakers.
- Research indicates that it takes four to seven years to learn academic English, the level necessary to perform on par academically with fluent English speakers.

Nativity

- Sixty-nine percent of English language learners are citizens by birth or naturalization.
- Secondary school English learners are more likely to be foreign-born (41 percent) than those in the primary grades (25 percent).

Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, “The Growing Numbers of Limited English Proficient Students: 1995/96—2005/06” (2007); National Center for Education Statistics; Institute of Education Sciences, “National Assessment of Title I Interim Report to Congress: Volume I: Implementation of Title I” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006); U.S. Department of Education, “Biennial Evaluation Report to Congress on the Implementation of the State Formula Grant Program” (2005); Kenji Hakuta, Yuko Goto Butler, and Daria Witt, “How Long Does It Take English Learners to Attain Proficiency?” Policy Report 2000-1 (The University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, 2000); Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Co., Inc., 1995); Personal communication from Randolph Capps, Senior Research Associate, and Karina Fortuny, Research Associate, The Urban Institute, May 6, 2008; and New York State Board of Regents, “Graduation Rates: Students Who Started 9th Grade in 2001, 2002 and 2003 and 2006-07 Regents Examination Results,” PowerPoint slides from August 11, 2008, available at <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/documents/Gradrates06-07FINAL.ppt>, (last accessed September 29, 2008).

A closer look at the role of time for English learners

Much of the research evaluating the academic achievement gap between English language learners and their English-fluent peers suggests that the language and academic gap cannot be overcome within the constraints of the traditional school day and that extended-day or -year learning opportunities should be considered.¹⁵ Time influences how quickly ELLs learn English. In some cases, it determines how rapidly they access core academic content, such as reading and math. And in all too many cases, there is rarely enough time to get those students to high school graduation.

ELLs need time to learn academic English

English language learners are in a race against the clock from the moment they enter the schoolhouse doors. Young native English speakers have an English vocabulary ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 words by the time they enter kindergarten.¹⁶ Closing this vocabulary gap can be a daunting task for young English learners and their teachers. And for recent arrivals in high school, who are expected to have a vocabulary of 50,000 English words to excel in the classroom,¹⁷ the task can appear all but impossible.

The task of bringing ELLs up to par with their peers is made more arduous given that native English-speaking students continue to improve their English language skills, all while ELLs are only beginning to build their English-language vocabulary and reading skills. In fact, some research indicates that the gap can even widen. One study found that the reading gap between ELLs and non-ELLs is one year in the first and third grades but grows to two years by the fifth grade.¹⁸

English language learners can acquire word recognition skills for reading and spelling equal to that of native English speakers within two years if they receive the appropriate instruction.¹⁹ Still, high-level competency in *academic English*, which is necessary for English learners to perform on par academically with their native-English-speaking peers, takes four to seven years.²⁰

Academic English encompasses a variety of essential skills such as “vocabulary knowledge (including multiple meanings of many English words), the ability to handle increasing word complexity and length over time, and understanding complex sentence structures and the corresponding syntax of the English language.”²¹

Proficiency in mathematics, which can require decoding mathematics terms and word problems, is also highly dependent on academic English. ELLs can acquire the fundamental, but minimal, skills required to speak, read, and understand English in a couple of years, but additional intensive instruction is necessary to help these students catch up with native English-speaking students who are also honing their more complex academic English skills. Some experts recommend allocating structured time for ELLs to practice “academic talk,” rather than relying on informal interactions outside of the classroom.²² Unfortunately, this is challenging given the limited amount of time in the school day.

ELLs often have less absolute learning time

English language learners are likely to lack exposure to the intensive instruction that they need in order to be successful in the classroom. For example, only 5 to 10 percent of instructional time in the classroom is allocated to vocabulary instruction.²³ Given the vocabulary gap described above, this is clearly inadequate for the English language learner. Moreover, because vocabulary instruction most often occurs in elementary schools and is virtually absent in the middle and high school years,²⁴ secondary school students who are learning English and particularly late-entrant ELLs are left with little support for one of their greatest immediate needs.

Commonly used language instruction strategies often involve pulling ELLs out of the regular classroom, which also results in less content exposure for ELLs. In fact, more than 40 states and the District of Columbia report using pull-out English language instruction in addition to other English language development strategies.²⁵ Pull-out language instruction programs, which are most common in elementary schools, take ELL students out of the classroom for an average of 30 to 45 minutes per day.²⁶ Some critics of pull-out programs argue that such programs result in fewer opportunities and time for English learners to obtain core academic content, making it difficult for them to keep pace with their native English peers.²⁷

The minutes in the day, year, or the educational career of a student are simply cut too short for some ELLs. In California, researchers have documented that English language learners are more likely than other students to be assigned to a particular year-round plan in which students attend school for four months twice a year with two-month breaks in between, resulting in 163 school days per year instead of the 180 days mandated by state law.²⁸ Not only do they have less time in the classroom, but the significant breaks in between are also likely to contribute to “learning loss”—the proven loss of academic content knowledge that takes place during the summer and is especially prevalent among low-income students.²⁹

The majority of high school ELLs are born in the United States, but secondary school English learners are more likely to be foreign-born (41 percent) than ELLs in the primary grades (25 percent).³⁰ Late-entrant immigrant ELLs entering American schools in their later years often suffer from having less time in the classroom. Many start their

American education in high school with limited or interrupted formal education from their home country, placing them at a great disadvantage in their pursuit of a high school diploma within four years.

The issue of time is a major factor for high school newcomers who have weak literacy skills in their native language, which can make the English language even more difficult to grasp. Some of the newcomer schools serving these students, such as the Internationals Network for Public Schools in New York, have found it necessary to recoup some of students' lost academic learning time by lengthening the traditional four-year path to high school graduation.

English language learners and expanded learning opportunities

There is limited research on the effect that expanded learning time initiatives—which as defined by the Center for American Progress, includes the participation of all students in a school and expands the school day or year by more than 30 percent—have on English language learners. There is also only limited research on the effect that broader expanded learning opportunities, such as after-school and summer school programs, have on English language learners. There are a few studies that examine after-school programs in California, where approximately a third of the nation’s English language learners reside.³¹ The studies demonstrate the potential role of expanded learning time in improving ELL academic outcomes, although these are not expanded learning time initiatives by the center’s definition.

One recent study of California elementary schools with comparable populations of ELLs found that schools with higher academic achievement levels among ELLs were more likely to provide struggling students with access to supplementary instruction such as after-school tutoring and Saturday school.³² Another meta-analysis of after-school literature indicates that expanded learning opportunities are often more successful among students learning English, even when programmatic effects are inconclusive among other students.³³ Two major evaluations, discussed below, provide more insight into the implications of expanded learning time and English language learners.

Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning

The James Irvine Foundation’s recent evaluation of its after-school initiative, Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning, is one of the few studies that specifies the effect of an academic-focused after-school program on English learners.³⁴ CORAL involves 5,000 students in the lowest-performing schools in five California cities, over half of whom are ELLs (53 percent).

CORAL recently changed the way that it uses time due to the program’s disappointing preliminary results. It has shifted from predominantly allocating time to enrichment and homework assistance activities to prioritizing literacy, which mirrors the school-based approach supported by current expanded learning time initiatives. The new focus on literacy includes read-alouds, book discussions, writing activities, vocabulary

practice, spelling and oral language skills, and independent reading. Some, but less, time is reserved for enrichment and homework assistance activities. The program evaluation weighs the effect that this time shift has had on student achievement.

The consistency and intensity of literacy strategies varied considerably across sites in the early years of implementation, so researchers were able to draw some comparisons across groups of students who received consistent and intensive exposure to the literacy strategies and those who were in programs that had not fully implemented the literacy strategies. In general, children who were exposed to consistent implementation of the new literacy-focused approach improved 0.45 grade levels in reading in the first year of the two-year evaluation, while those who were less exposed to the literacy strategies improved only 0.26 grade levels. Once the literacy strategies were being used in all sites fairly consistently in the second year of the evaluation, all children improved 0.44 grade levels, on average.

The report's authors underscored their findings with respect to English learners. ELLs who received consistent exposure to the literacy strategies demonstrated the similarly high gains that their English-proficient peers showed. In addition, almost all parents reported that the after-school program helped improve their children's English language skills. As a result, the authors indicated that the after-school program held great promise for children learning English.

Several literacy strategies were used specifically for ELLs in the program sites, such as independent reading in their native language and one-on-one native language support, but these strategies were not used consistently or intensively. Instead, the literacy-building strategies used for all children were considered effective for ELLs. The increased gains across all students indicate that a schoolwide expanded learning program, especially one that is academic-focused, can prove beneficial for all students, including English learners.

California's After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program

California established the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program in 1998 to provide literacy and academic enrichment as well as youth development support for students. Funded programs are required to operate at least three hours per day and at least until 6:00 p.m.

Various program evaluations between 1999 and 2001 have unveiled particularly significant results for English language learners.³⁵ For example, an evaluation of program sites in Los Angeles Unified School District, where 53 percent of elementary-school-aged participants and 49 percent of middle school participants are ELLs, found that participating ELLs'

scores on the state's math assessment at one site were sizeably and statistically higher than English learners who did not participate in the state after-school program. Also, students who participated in the after-school programs for a longer length of time demonstrated the largest gains, according to the Santa Ana evaluation.

Longitudinal evaluations of the state-supported after-school program in Los Angeles also yield promising results for English learners. A five-year longitudinal study of the program in which 60 percent of the participants were English learners found that ELLs participating in the program were significantly more likely to transition out of the limited-English proficient category than nonparticipants. The findings also suggested that while after-school participants who entered the program had significantly lower math scores than nonparticipants, the Los Angeles after-school program was able to close that math achievement gap.

A profile of initiatives expanding learning opportunities for English learners

Expanded learning time initiatives involving ELLs, varying in scope, are well underway in schools and districts across the country. Some schools and districts are targeting the additional time to their ELL students alone. Others have lengthened the school day or year for all their students, identifying the added time as essential to ELLs but beneficial for all students.

Gompers Charter Middle School: San Diego, California³⁶

Gompers Charter Middle School, which serves approximately 800 students in grades 6 through 9, was converted into a public charter school in 2005. Nearly half of Gompers' students (47 percent) are English learners, which is significantly higher than the state's proportion of 25 percent.³⁷ In addition, 95 percent of students are "struggling readers," according to school staff.

When the school established its charter school status, school staff believed that it was important to expand instructional time in the classroom. The school day has been lengthened to the equivalent of 11 additional days, or slightly over two weeks. The school day begins at 8:05 a.m. with 90 minutes each of mathematics and English language arts instruction. Students then rotate their afternoons until 3:30 p.m. between two 85-minute sessions of social studies, history, science, foreign language, or electives. Between 3:30–4:00 p.m., all students participate in Encore, which offers opportunities to participate in various school groups, such as student government. Gompers students then have the option to participate in several other expanded learning opportunities by choosing to participate in Extended Encore, which runs from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Extended Encore is an opportunity for students to participate in school clubs, sports, and other enrichment activities, and is similar to the shorter, mandatory version. Finally, it is mandatory for all ELLs to attend Saturday Academy, a two-hour program that supports English language development skills.

School staff make sure to explain the necessary time commitment to parents; they say that "more time in school is critical" for Gompers English learners. The additional time ensures that ELLs are exposed to the content and language models that they need to excel academically.

It has only been three years since the school established its charter status and implemented a longer school-day schedule, but the outcomes have already been impressive. The school had a poor academic reputation, and gang activity among students was common. The school's ELL test scores were the worst in the San Diego Unified School District. Test scores among ELLs are still relatively low, but they have risen steadily over the last four years, increasing 69 points on the California Academic Performance Index from 520 in 2004-05 to 589 in 2007-08. In addition, gang activity and school suspensions have dropped dramatically, according to school staff.

YES Prep Lee: Houston, Texas³⁸

YES Prep Lee is the newest addition to the Yes Prep public charter school system in Houston, Texas. Currently in its second year, YES Prep Lee serves grades 6 and 7, but has plans to expand, one year at a time, up to grade 12. The public charter school is unique in that it is housed on the campus of a traditional high school, Lee High School. The open-enrollment public charter school primarily serves students residing in the Gulfton area near Houston, a predominantly Hispanic and immigrant community. The average student enters YES Prep Lee two grade levels behind, according to school staff. Approximately 87 percent of YES Prep Lee students are Latino, and 42 percent of all students are English language learners.³⁹

The school day at YES Prep Lee lasts from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., approximately two hours longer than the typical school day. The additional time allows for two hours each of mathematics and English language arts. Students have the opportunity to participate in various enrichment activities in the afternoon, including athletics and school clubs. Students also attend school one Saturday per month, which is typically spent on service learning activities or tutorials in preparation for the statewide spring assessments. And students attend three weeks of summer classes, which include an early orientation of the school, remediation, and project-based academic electives.

Academic achievement outcomes at the other four YES Prep campuses have been impressive, and YES Prep Lee is no exception. During the 2007-08 year, 95 percent of ELLs at YES Prep Lee met the state standard in reading/English language arts, and 97 percent met the state standard in mathematics.⁴⁰ Although this was the first year the school was open, these results mirror the above 90 percentile sixth-grade scores in reading and math at the other YES Prep campuses.

YES Prep staff are quick to state that their results are not just about adding time to the day. They point out that the way time is used is critical. YES Prep has chosen to use the additional time to concentrate on core academic content, and staff maintain that the schools' strategies for teaching and allocating instructional time are useful for all students, includ-

ing ELLs. Rather than providing language instruction in isolation of academic content, YES Prep aims to help their ELL students master literacy in academic content areas, a goal that staff believe has made the difference for their students.

Jacob Hiatt Magnet School: Worcester, Massachusetts⁴¹

Jacob Hiatt Magnet School serves grades PK-6 and is one of 26 schools participating in Massachusetts' statewide Expanded Learning Time Initiative. The Massachusetts initiative, the only one of its kind to expand time schoolwide by at least 25 percent in various schools throughout the state, is in its third year of implementation. Hiatt was one of the first schools involved in the program.

Hiatt's English language learner population makes up a quarter of the school's enrollment, and nearly 70 percent of its students are low income. Students at Hiatt attend school from 7:50 a.m. to 3:37 p.m. The school has chosen to redesign its school calendar to include 10 hours of literacy instruction a week—two hours per day. And while school staff determined that all students in the school would benefit from increased time on literacy, they believe that the literacy block is critical for their ELL students. Teachers “team-teach” during the literacy instruction period, which allows for one-on-one and small group instruction. And English learners are placed in small groups made up of no more than eight ELLs in their grade level to concentrate on their literacy needs.

Mathematics and enrichment activities are also prioritized in the expanded school schedule. Hiatt students have an additional 30 minutes of mathematics per day—90 minutes total—as a result of the expanded learning time initiative. During the final period of the day, students can take advantage of additional tutoring or academic time, or take enrichment electives, and students in grades 4 through 6 take musical instrument lessons.

The school witnessed significant gains during its first year of the expanded learning time initiative. Students across all subgroups made adequate yearly progress in English language arts for the first time in at least three years. Since then, staff report that progress has been “incremental” as a result of the early gains. ELL achievement scores have been mixed in the last two years, but there are some highlights. For example, the school's fourth-grade English learners outperformed district English learners by nearly 20 points on Massachusetts's Composite Performance Index, which measures progress toward proficiency.⁴²

Like Gompers Charter Middle School and YES Prep Lee, Jacob Hiatt Magnet School approached expanded learning time as a whole-school strategy. According to staff, the expanded school schedule is helpful to their English learner students, but all Hiatt students reap the benefits of more time. The small-group, one-on-one time that is afforded to English learners during the literacy block is an added benefit, which may not have been possible without the expanded learning time initiative.

Los Arcos Learning Center, Salida Union School District: Salida, California⁴³

The Los Arcos Learning Center was established in 2003 to support the English language development and reading skills of English language learners in Salida Union School District, a PK-8 school district located in California's San Joaquin Valley. The center began as one site serving students in grades 2 to 5, but the district has since opened three additional sites—one additional center serving elementary school English language learners, one for middle school ELLs, and another site for English-fluent students who are struggling in reading and language arts. Because the additional learning time is not targeted to all students in the district or schools, it is not an expanded-learning-time school by the center's definition. Still, much can be learned about the promise of expanded learning time for ELLs and other students from Salida's Los Arcos Center.

District staff believe it is important to provide supplementary academic support to children who are learning English, and they maintain that some children may need up to 300 hours of additional time over the course of a year, or 25 percent more time, to catch up and keep pace with their peers. The Los Arcos after-school program targets beginning and intermediate English learners, in particular, based on California's English language proficiency assessment. It also targets ELLs who are reading below grade level.

The students participating in the program receive an additional 1.5 hours of academic learning time five days a week for 11 consecutive weeks. During the 90-minute sessions, students rotate between 30 minutes of English language development, led by a credentialed teacher; 30 minutes of computer-based reading support; and 30 minutes of independent language development and reading through hands-on activities using the LeapFrog Learning System.

Approximately 20 students participate in each 1.5-hour session. A paraprofessional and a high school student staff each session in addition to the credentialed teacher. Staff make a point to hire only part-time credentialed teachers for their expanded learning centers, instead of relying on teachers who have been in the classroom all day, to ensure that teachers bring the necessary energy and drive to the program. The district also has a full-time "extended day" principal who oversees all of the district's expanded learning opportunities.

English language learners participating in the program are demonstrating strong outcomes overall. Average attendance rates are above 95 percent, even though students must be transported to the districtwide center. Staff say that students enjoy their participation in the expanded learning program because it does not resemble the type of instruction that happens during their school day, though it does build on the instruction that is happening in the classroom. District staff report that students improve their reading skills by 2 to 2.5 grade levels after 20 to 25 hours of additional "time on task."⁴⁴ District staff also add that 42 percent of students participating in Los Arcos improved their English language skills, as measured by the California English Language Development Test, in comparison to 24 per-

cent of students who do not attend Los Arcos,⁴⁵ and 61.8 percent of Los Arcos students met the language growth targets compared to 50.8 percent of students not attending the center.⁴⁶ District staff also credit Los Arcos with helping to boost overall district performance in meeting English language growth targets for the district's ELL population; the percent of ELL students meeting their targets has increased from 55 to 63 percent districtwide.⁴⁷

A long waiting list of students wish to participate in the Los Arcos program even though the center has expanded its reach over the years by opening up additional sites. Los Arcos leverages various funding streams, including federal dollars from NCLB's Title I and III programs, as well as state English language acquisition dollars.

Common themes across sites profiled

Not all of these initiatives adhere to the center's definition of expanded learning time, but they do provide a glimpse of how additional learning time can support instruction and learning for English language learners. In most of the cases profiled, school staff underscored the significance of incorporating more time in the school day and year to support improved academic achievement for all students, not just English language learners. In fact, several school staff remarked that instructional reforms and strategies such as expanded learning time are good by definition because they work for all students. Even in the case of Los Arcos, which began as a program only for ELLs, district staff have begun offering expanded learning opportunities to English-proficient students who are struggling in school.

In general, all of the sites leveraged the additional time to focus on core academic content such as reading and math. As a result, it is not uncommon for students at these sites to spend 1.5 to 2 hours on math and reading. Many of the sites profiled also ensured ample opportunity for students to participate in school clubs, athletics, and service learning opportunities. These enrichment activities were incorporated in the expanded day in most cases, ensuring that all students had some degree of engagement in these activities.

Expanded learning time occurred in conjunction with other school and district reform efforts at most of these sites. For example, Gompers' lengthened school schedule coincided with the school's conversion to charter status. An expanded day and year has long been a tradition of the YES Prep school system model, but YES Prep Lee's focus on service learning and on-site collaboration with Lee High School clearly demonstrate that expanded learning time is part of a comprehensive schoolwide reform strategy.

These schools represent an impressive snapshot of schools and districts implementing a longer school day or year. ELLs in most of these schools are outperforming or achieving greater gains than other ELLs throughout the state, district, and community on state reading and math assessments. Their successes with both ELLs and non-ELLs with an expanded day or year schedule inspire serious consideration of expanded learning time initiatives as a whole-school improvement strategy.

Conclusion

Expanded learning time initiatives hold great promise for the rapidly growing population of school-aged English language learners. It is not an easy undertaking to learn and excel in math, reading and language arts, science, and other core academic subjects that have become integral to a college- and work-ready curriculum, all while learning a new language. The challenge is not made easier given that ELLs are more likely to be concentrated in urban, high-poverty schools that are plagued with the well-known challenges of finding highly qualified and effective teachers and adequate resources to support teaching and learning. It is often because of these obstacles, however, that many schools and districts with a large ELL student population have taken the lead to incorporate additional learning time for their ELL students, or in some cases, all their students. Several legislative proposals have also been introduced at the federal level in Congress to support expanded learning initiatives, including one proposal targeted to middle and high school English language learners.⁴⁸

Among the schools profiled above that expanded learning time schoolwide, school staff stressed that the additional time was indispensable for their English learners, but that expanded learning time offers benefits for all students. Many of the schools and districts chose a lengthened school day, week, and year to strengthen students' knowledge and skills in reading and language arts and mathematics. However, these schools often incorporated mandatory time for students to engage in school clubs, athletics, and other enrichment activities that help to keep students engaged in school and address the dropout challenge. The lengthened school day and week allowed for individualized or small-group instruction to target learning gaps depending on students' needs.

Involving all students in an expanded learning time initiative is more likely to ensure that the school schedule is redesigned completely to maximize the benefits of the added time. Given the broad benefits of redesigning and lengthening the school day, week, and year, the Center for American Progress recommends the implementation of expanded learning time as a schoolwide strategy for all students.

Still, there are issues that are unique to English learners and expanded learning. A key consideration is late-entrant ELLs in high schools. If there is one group of students that can most benefit from additional learning time, late-entrant ELLs are a prime target. Yet high schools face some unique hurdles in implementing an expanded day and year, such as supporting students who work after school, on weekends, and during the summer; or accommodating students who want to participate in extracurricular activities.⁴⁹

Some of the best practices that have been identified to meet these challenges and support expanded learning time at the high school level are distance learning and apprenticeships, internships, and career academies that provide opportunities to earn money and school credit.⁵⁰ Early college and dual enrollment schools, which allow high school students to earn college credit while working toward their high school diploma, are also an innovative way to expand learning time for high school ELLs who may need more than the traditional four years to master the English language and catch up or stay on track academically.

Research on expanded learning time is limited, particularly as it pertains to English language learners. Yet initiatives and academic achievement outcomes at Jacob Hiatt Magnet School, Salida Union School District, Gompers Charter Middle School, and YES Prep Lee suggest that additional learning time as a whole-school reform strategy merits strong and careful consideration, particularly among schools with a large English language learner population.

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