



Union and District Partnerships to Expand Learning Time

Three Schools' Experiences

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Introduction and summary

Charter schools have been leaders in the movement to expand learning time.¹ They have the advantage of enjoying greater flexibility and autonomy than most traditional public schools, making it easier to expand the school calendar and implement new reforms.

To be fair, there are broad impacts for traditional schools and their communities when the school day or year is expanded—even when it is as little as one additional hour. School bus schedules might need to be shifted citywide; afterschool and community-based providers may have to adjust their services; and teachers' work schedules, along with compensation and benefits, must be re-examined.

While charter schools must confront these challenges as well, the length of their school day or year has fewer implications. Bus transportation schedules, staff allocation, and classroom curricula are more malleable. Charter schools are also less likely to be unionized—though recent unionization efforts among charter schools indicate that this could change. As a result, charter school leaders must ensure that their teachers and staff are content with the school workday and year, but these issues are less likely to be collectively bargained.

Despite the challenges, traditional public schools have begun to follow suit on expanding learning time. And the Obama administration is calling for more schools to rethink the school day and calendar,² making it a key reform strategy in the school turnaround and transformation models in both the Race to the Top Fund and School Improvement Grants programs under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

As a result, traditional public schools—particularly struggling schools that want a bite of these federal funds to support their school turnaround efforts—will need to examine the use of time within their school day and year, as will affiliated teachers and unions. In the most successful implementations of expanded learning time, school and district leaders have worked in close collaboration with teachers and teachers' unions.

This report examines the challenges and successes of implementing expanded learning time in a traditional public school environment. It highlights the role of teachers and teachers unions in negotiating an expanded schedule and reviews relevant literature on teacher time and collective bargaining. It also takes a look at Massachusetts's experience with expanding learning time. The state has funded expanded learning time in 26 schools since 2005, and much can be learned from its experience.

In addition, we profiled three traditional public schools that have implemented a longer day or year to varying degrees to better understand the significant issues that school leaders, teachers, and union leaders have grappled with in moving to a longer day and year. The lessons that they learned along the way are invaluable to both practitioners and policymakers alike. We interviewed several school leaders, teachers, and union leaders for this report and thank them for sharing their perspectives so generously with the hope that other schools and policy can be better informed by their example.

Based on the experiences of these three schools, we find:

- Side letters or side agreements—amendments to teacher collective bargaining agreements—are often the simplest and fastest way for a union and district to agree to expand learning time. They allow one or more schools to make changes to the collective bargaining agreement—the labor agreement between the school district and teachers union—without affecting the schedule throughout the entire district. It also provides a way to implement expanded learning time without renegotiating the entire collective bargaining agreement, which can be a lengthy process.
- Third-party organizations can play an integral role in district-union negotiations over expanding learning time. They can act as a mediator and facilitate the negotiation process, keeping the negotiations focused on the key priorities for both the district and union.
- Additional compensation for teachers is not a necessary ingredient when expanding the school day. Although one school profiled in this report does supplement teachers' salaries for extra hours worked, other schools have found ways to stagger teacher workdays, resulting in no additional time worked or additional compensation.
- Unions must be brought into the process early and be active participants in designing the expanded schedule. Union support was essential to the success of the agreement and implementation of the longer day in all of the schools profiled.
- School-based planning teams offer teachers a way to be involved in the discussions and negotiations around redesigning the school day. Expanding the school day will have a tremendous effect on teachers and their input and feedback is necessary throughout the design process.
- Two of the schools profiled said that making teaching voluntary during expanded learning time was key to the success of their redesigned schedules. In some cases this means giving teachers the ability to transfer to a school that has not expanded the school day or giving teachers the option not to teach beyond their contractual time.

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