



# Transforming Schools to Meet the Needs of Students

## Improving School Quality and Increasing Learning Time in ESEA

America's public education stands at a crossroads. As the reality of what it takes to educate all students to the same high standards bumps up against the rigidity of the conventional school calendar the status quo has begun to shift: Expanding time in school has become a core strategy of the national education reform agenda.

In 2008, the late Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Congressman Donald Payne (D-NJ) introduced the Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act, or TIME Act, which is designed to jumpstart state and district initiatives to expand time by at least 300 hours for all students in participating low-performing, high-poverty schools. The bill was reintroduced in the House and Senate in July 2009. And in his first major education address in March 2009, President Barack Obama claimed forthrightly “the challenges of a new century demand more time in the classroom.”<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Obama's Secretary of Education Arne Duncan constantly reiterates the need for a longer school day and year in interviews and public appearances.<sup>2</sup>

The Obama administration and Congress have backed this reform strategy with an unprecedented amount of new resources through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA. ARRA's guidelines for education funding, including the Race to the Top grants—competitive state grants to advance reforms around standards and assessments, data systems, teacher and principal effectiveness, and school turnarounds—and the School Improvement Grant program—aimed at transforming chronically low-performing schools—require “increased learning time” among the key strategies to be implemented for the lowest-performing schools in America. The president's fiscal year 2011 budget also calls for reforms in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program—which currently supports academic and enrichment opportunities for students during nonschool hours, including afterschool programs, in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA—to further support expanded learning time efforts. Never has there been such an opportunity to leverage the effort to expand upon the conventional school day and year to generate substantial change in so many schools at once.

ESEA, which is pending reauthorization, presents an extraordinary opportunity to build on these reform milestones and reshape our school system to better position American students to succeed in our competitive world economy. This policy brief provides an overview of the most recent research related to learning time, outlines current on-the-ground efforts to expand learning time and the lessons learned from these initiatives, and argues for making expanded learning time an essential part of a comprehensive school improvement strategy under ESEA.

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## Relevant research on expanded learning time

Over the last few years, researchers have sought to document the characteristics, methods, behaviors, resources, and policies of schools where low-income children succeed at high levels and quality education takes place. This research takes a careful look at schools that generate both an atmosphere and a record of student success measured quantitatively by performance on tests and qualitatively by describing the school culture.<sup>3</sup>

The methods, narrative, and foci of this research may vary, but most studies seem to converge on four or five key characteristics that render these schools effective at raising student performance and closing achievement gaps. The schools' successes typically revolve around strong leadership, effective teaching, data-driven instruction, a culture of excellence, and more instructional time than conventional schools, either in the form of a longer schedule for all students or in targeted academic support classes. It is the combination of these elements that leads to high student performance.

The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, or McREL, the leading U.S. education regional lab in interpreting the implications of standards-based reform, found that experienced teachers believed that they needed at least 20 percent more hours to teach the four core academic subjects—English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science—than are available in a standard school year.<sup>4</sup>

And the National Center on Time & Learning found that 9 in 10 schools considered their longer day and year to be essential to meeting their educational goals in a survey of nearly 250 schools that feature an expanded schedule.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, many educators in this country are finding that the standard school calendar does not fit their students' needs.

Expanded learning time initiatives have demonstrated great promise in improving academic outcomes among students who are most likely to fall behind, such as English language learners.<sup>6</sup> Distinct from afterschool programs, schools with an expanded day, week, and year ensure that all students within a school benefit from increased time for academic and enrichment opportunities.

Some of the most compelling research on school time is coming from the charter school sector, where nonconformity to the conventional schedule seems to be the norm. A new database of expanded-time schools compiled by the National Center on Time & Learning contains hundreds of charter schools that operate on a schedule that is meaningfully longer than surrounding public schools.<sup>7</sup>

Economist Caroline Hoxby's recent report on New York City charter schools is a powerful documentation of time's importance in a school's ability to positively affect student achievement. The report is heralded for the strength of its methodology, which uses a lottery-based evaluation to compare achievement data from 2000 to 2008 of students admitted to charter schools against data from those students who applied but were not admitted. Hoxby and her team found that, on average, a student who attended a charter school from kindergarten through eighth grade would close about 86 percent of the "Scarsdale-Harlem achievement gap" in math and 66 percent of the achievement gap in English. In analyzing those factors that might contribute to this closing of the achievement gap, Hoxby found that the strongest predictor of high student performance among charter schools was a longer school year. She also discovered that a longer school year is highly correlated with a longer school day within the schools she studied.<sup>8</sup>

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### Current on-the-ground efforts to expand learning time

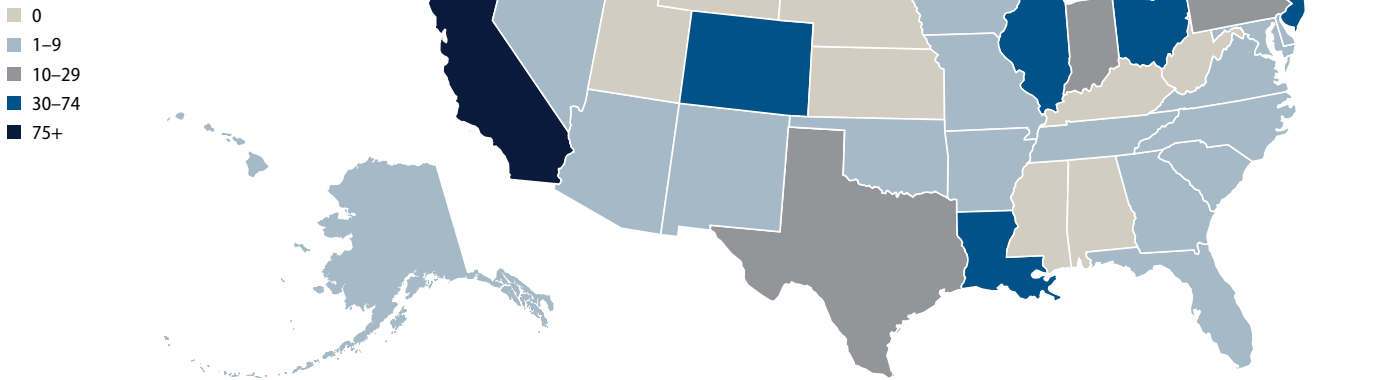
Education leaders in a select number of school districts have embraced these lessons. Mark Roosevelt, the superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools, took an aggressive step to remake some of the lowest-performing schools in his district by creating a new class of schools, the Accelerated Learning Academies. Each of these eight schools was required to implement a new curriculum, teachers were provided intensive professional development, and, because he believed that these changes were not sufficient on their own, Superintendent Roosevelt dedicated the resources needed to convert these schools to a longer day and year, giving every student in these schools about 20 percent more instructional time.<sup>9</sup> Over the last several years, other districts including New Orleans, New York, Miami, and Boston have also experimented with adding school time to address the needs of struggling students.

Massachusetts implemented its own strategy to redesign the school day in 2005 by launching a statewide competitive grant program that enabled schools to add 300 more hours per year to their schedules. Currently, 22 Massachusetts schools across a dozen districts participate, with more than 12,000 students now attending school for almost eight hours every day. Colorado, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Alabama, and Oklahoma have launched initiatives to replicate this model.

In total, more than 650 schools across 36 states have been identified as having a schedule that is meaningfully longer than surrounding public schools.

## Nearly 700 schools across the country operate with an expanded day and/or year

California and Massachusetts contain over 75 schools with an expanded day and/or year



Source: The National Center on Time & Learning.

### Lessons from the field: Expanding time and transforming schools

As policymakers intensify their efforts to, in President Obama’s words, “rethink the school day to incorporate more time,” the question that lies before us is how to translate our sense that more time will generate more learning—and in turn produce a more educated, more engaged workforce and citizenry—into both a policy and a set of practices that live up to the promise. Starting at the school level, how do we integrate more time in a way that raises educational quality and optimizes learning? Then, drawing lessons from the field, how do we craft policy to build an organizational and financial structure that best supports school transformation around a redesigned day? Only a policy that grows out from what we have learned by adding time to existing schools will lead to widespread success and, in turn, lead us toward our ultimate goal of raising achievement for all students.

This review of the possibilities for expanded time grows from a deep understanding that in education reform there are no silver bullets. For more learning time to deliver meaningful results, other key elements and conditions like strong principal leadership, effective teachers, and a culture of excellence must be in place in schools. The success of more time depends on how well it is added and spent.

The entire school day will ideally be redesigned with a review of how current time is being used along with the strategic addition of more time to better meet students’ needs. Yet we also maintain that without more time than is currently available for schools serving our

most disadvantaged children, the effects of these other essential characteristics of good schools will be weaker. Quantity enhances quality. Effective teaching, and all that supports it, can only bring learning so far without sufficient time.

Recent attempts to build school reform around an expanded day in a few districts, together with the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time, or ELT Initiative, provide several important lessons for policy and practice. We explore a collection of these lessons below, demonstrating how drawing from the field has led to these particular judgments.

Twenty-two traditional district schools in Massachusetts have expanded their schedule by 300 hours under the Expanded Learning Time initiative launched in 2005 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in partnership with a local intermediary, Massachusetts 2020. The requirements of the Massachusetts ELT initiative include:

- Each school must expand its schedule for all students by at least 300 hours per year. Schools can opt to add hours to the day, days to the year, or some combination thereof.
- Schools are required to add time in three areas: (a) core academics, (b) student enrichment programming (often provided in partnership with community organizations), and (c) time for teachers to plan, collaborate, review data, and participate in professional development.
- Schools receive \$1,300 per student to support the expansion. Union agreements to address teacher compensation issues are negotiated locally.
- Schools receive modest funding to engage in a year-long planning process before the expanded schedule's implementation.

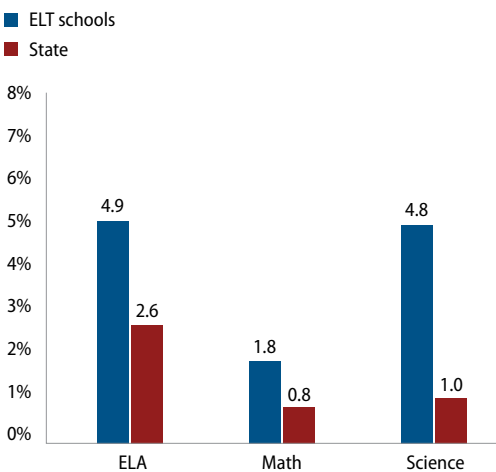
The ELT program, now in its fourth year of implementation, has begun to hold schools accountable to a “performance contract” whereby a school must meet certain required student and school-level performance targets to be recommended for continued funding. The first cohort of ELT schools—a total of eight—will be accountable for meeting these targets in spring 2011.

Early results from the initiative are promising:

- Across all ELT schools and grades in 2008-09 proficiency rates in math, English-language arts, or ELA, and science grew faster than state averages.

**Change in percentage of Massachusetts students scoring proficient in English language arts, math, and science, 2008-09 school year**

Expanded learning time schools versus state



Source: The National Center on Time & Learning.

- Middle school students have performed especially well. Many middle schools are significantly narrowing the achievement gap with the state in both ELA and math.
- The exit grades—the fifth, sixth, and eighth grades of several elementary and middle schools—have dramatically narrowed or entirely closed the gap with the state in both English and math.

Not all of the schools in the ELT initiative are excelling at the same rate, however. A look at the highest-performing expanded-time schools in Massachusetts and across the country reveal the following lessons:

### Significant additional time and comprehensive school redesign

There is inadequate research at this time delineating the optimum number of hours high-poverty schools need to succeed at high levels, but an analysis of the most successful expanded-time schools shows that they add at least 25 percent more time. The school day and year schedule in all cases was thoughtfully developed based on the academic needs of students and with input from school faculty. Some schools expanded teaching blocks for core subjects while others added extra classes for the same subjects. Enrichment classes are woven throughout the day and teachers have more time to meet, plan, review students data, and participate in professional development.

### Strong leadership and teacher collaboration

The highest-performing schools have strong school leaders and a collaborative approach to nurturing teachers. Teachers are considered professionals and given the time and support to excel. Teacher collaboration is structured, focused, and uses data to identify areas where instruction needs to be strengthened and students need additional support. There are high standards and expectations for teachers and students alike.

### Focused academic goals and data use to strengthen instruction and drive academic achievement

Too often, schools serving high-need populations try to do too much. The faculty is not focused on a clear set of academic goals, and they do not use data to make adjustments when students are not progressing. The highest-performing schools, by contrast, are focused and have a continuous improvement approach to teaching and learning. They also use regular formative assessment results to help teachers and school leaders ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed.

## Individualized instructional supports for students

Data can help identify students that need extra supports, and expanded time provides schools time to address those needs in a variety of ways. For example, struggling students can be paired with the strongest teachers in extra support classes. Enrichment classes can be created to reinforce core academics. Longer class blocks provide more opportunities for students to ask questions and explore the subject at deeper levels. Schools that continuously monitor and adjust to meet the needs of individualized students show higher success rates.

## Engaged students and positive school culture

Expanded school time allows for new and engaging enrichment programming—often provided in partnership with community organizations—that expands the curriculum and helps students build new skills. Whether students are active in the orchestra or jazz band, participate in internships or public service projects, or learn to swim at the local YMCA as a part of their school experience, these options are broadening opportunities for children. Over time, it is likely that effective expanded learning time schools will show that these opportunities, in addition to higher achievement gains, help students engage more fully in school and keep them from dropping out.

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## Expanded learning time should be prioritized in ESEA

ESEA reauthorization holds several opportunities to scale up the successes that states like Massachusetts are seeing with expanded learning time. A restructured School Improvement Grants program, 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, and Supplemental Educational Services program, are among the ESEA programs that inherently align with the goals of expanded learning time—increasing learning opportunities for students and improving academic outcomes in struggling schools. In each of these instances, the TIME Act serves as an effective blueprint to build out these programs and include more learning time for students and teachers.

## School improvement grants

The No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, provided an initial framework for identifying schools needing improvement. Since NCLB's enactment, however, it has become apparent that more sophisticated strategies and systems of school improvement are needed. ARRA's four school intervention models—turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformation—offer an innovative system of school improvement upon which ESEA can build.

Expanded learning time, or “increased learning time” is one of the reforms required by schools that undergo the turnaround and transformation models. These models also include taking steps to improve school leader and teacher effectiveness and teacher recruitment and retention, implementing student-driven instructional reforms and a community-oriented focus, and taking steps to enhance or replace the school’s governance structure.

The Turnaround and Transformation models both underscore the role of expanding learning time for students and teachers in a comprehensive school improvement strategy, and the TIME Act includes important provisions that can enhance a school’s improvement plan. For example, the TIME Act requires schools to undergo a one-year planning period with a team made up of school leaders, teachers, union representatives, and community stakeholders, to completely redesign the school’s calendar with the additional time. This process allows the school to examine data and students’ needs and consider how learning time can be used effectively to address academic achievement gaps.

If modeled after ARRA’s school intervention models to target certain reforms to the lowest-performing schools—including expanded learning time—ESEA’s School Improvement Grants, aimed at transforming chronically low-performing schools, can make an impressive impact in the national school turnaround effort.

## 21st Century Community Learning Centers

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers, or CCLC program, which supports academic and enrichment opportunities for students during nonschool hours—including afterschool programs—is another ESEA program that can help schools’ efforts to increase learning time. Afterschool programs can help address both students’ academic and nonacademic needs, but participation in these programs is voluntary—a significant drawback.<sup>10</sup> And often low-income and disadvantaged students who are most likely to benefit from such programs are less likely to participate. Expanded learning time schools, by contrast, ensure that all students in a school benefit from increased academic and enrichment opportunities.

In the president’s 2011 fiscal year budget, the Obama administration proposes to reform the \$1.16 billion CCLC program, which currently restricts the use of formula-grant funds to activities that take place during nonschool hours, to “focus funding on models that redesign and extend the school day, week, or year to provide additional time for students to engage in academic activities, additional time for enrichment activities, and time for educators to collaborate, and improve instruction.”<sup>11</sup> If reformed and implemented in ways that would enable schools to offer an expanded, seamless day, week, or year for all students schoolwide, a competitive federal grant program can help propel a number of state and districts to increase learning time beyond the traditional school day and year.



Strengthened partnerships with traditional afterschool providers and other community organizations is a key purpose of the TIME Act, and many schools with an expanded school calendar have partnered with such organizations to deliver enrichment opportunities that support students' academic learning. In fact, for many expanded learning time schools, the increased time and redesigned calendar has elevated the role of community providers in the school by allowing them to become more integral to the school, serving more students and participating in the overall governance of the school.<sup>12</sup>

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program currently provides important supports to students and families when school is not in session. As our nation turns its attention to turning around low-performing schools, however, expanded, improved, and redesigned schools are a necessary investment.

### Supplemental Education Services

The Supplemental Education Services program, or SES, may present another opportunity to support more comprehensive efforts to increase learning time, including expanded learning time initiatives. Established under NCLB, SES supports tutoring and other academic assistance for students in Title I schools that have been identified as needing improvement.

Critiques regarding the quality of service providers and low student participation rates—particularly among English language learners, students with disabilities, and other students who can most benefit from additional academic assistance—have made the program's longevity questionable. Should SES be reformed and retained in the reauthorization, however, those funds could instead be targeted to support additional academic support for all students in a school through the thoughtful expansion of school time instead of the current model of limited tutoring time for a few students. Expanded learning time initiatives complement the program's original goals of providing academic support for students in high-poverty, struggling schools while addressing some of its most serious shortcomings, including those related to participation rates and quality.<sup>13</sup>

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### A wise investment

Federal investments in expanded learning time are among the most prudent in a challenging economic landscape. A Center for American Progress report finds that expanding learning time for students by 30 percent can require as little as a 6 percent increase in a school's budget while upper-end estimates fall at 20 percent, depending on the school's staffing model.<sup>14</sup> In Massachusetts, expanded learning time schools receive an additional \$1,300 per student, which translates to providing 25 percent more time for all students in participating schools at 10 percent to 15 percent more per pupil. This is a competitive investment given that the average maximum amount that school districts reported allocating for SES was \$1,434 in 2004-05 according to a U.S. Department of Education

2008 report.<sup>15</sup> At a similar cost, Massachusetts schools are expanding learning time by 300 hours for all students, providing more students a balanced curriculum that includes both academics and enrichment, and turning around some of their most struggling schools.

Twenty-first century schools require forward-looking and innovative solutions. Expanded learning time initiatives challenge traditional conceptions of time and even the use of school and community venues, with improved student achievement and a well-rounded education serving as the primary goals. As the National Education Commission on Time and Learning explained 15 years ago, “Time is learning’s warden. Our time-bound mentality has fooled us all into believing that schools can educate all of the people all of the time in a school year of 180 six-hour days. The consequence of our self-deception has been to ask the impossible of our students.”

More time alone is insufficient. But more time used well, in combination with a comprehensive reform strategy that includes improved access to effective teachers and school leaders and robust standards and accountability, is an invaluable component in our nation’s goal to turn around the most troubled, high-poverty schools and improve academic achievement among our neediest students. With the TIME Act as a model, ESEA can expand learning time through a variety of avenues, including reforming CCLC, SES, and School Improvement Grant program funds, to transform schools and better address students’ needs.

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## Endnotes

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## About the Center for American Progress

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

## About the National Center on Time & Learning

The National Center on Time & Learning is dedicated to expanding learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education, with an emphasis on underserved children.

Through research, public policy and technical assistance, we support initiatives that add more school time for academic and enrichment opportunities to help all children meet the demands of the 21st Century.

