



Breaking the Mold

Combining Community Schools with Expanded Learning Time
to Help Educationally Disadvantaged Students

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Introduction and summary

Think schooling in the United States and the image that comes to mind is of a red brick building filled with classrooms each lined with straight rows of desks facing a teacher in front of a blackboard. And when the bell rings every morning at exactly the same time, children enter that red brick school only to exit a few hours later when the bell rings again at exactly the same time every afternoon. School is the place where children are expected to orderly progress through each grade to an eventual high school graduation. This picture of schooling has been ingrained in our daily routine for generations.

In general, our public schools treat the majority of children within a school building the same regardless of their lives outside of school. But what about the students who face nonacademic obstacles to learning? A student who does not have access to preventive health care, for example, may be confronted with impediments to success in school. And what about the student who is struggling academically and could benefit from additional time for instruction and enrichment than what is prescribed under the traditional school calendar?

Teachers and administrators try their best to help students succeed, but they typically lack the capacity to provide additional supports to children beyond academic instruction. Teachers run up against the inflexible confines imposed by the school calendar. They often lack time to cover all material. And the demands of meeting academic standards often mean that enrichment opportunities at school are placed on the backburner. It's time to re-envision how resources can be used to help struggling children succeed academically.

This paper will examine two schoolwide reform models—community schools and expanded learning time—that challenge the rigid boundaries of the conventional school model in order to close the achievement gap.

The reforms analyzed in this paper are targeted toward students who are “educationally disadvantaged” because they live in disproportionately low- or lower middle-income communities—both white and nonwhite—or who attend schools

that are predominantly comprised of minority students. These educationally disadvantaged kids can benefit from both the community-school and expanded-learning-time models.

Community schools, through results-focused partnerships, provide services that attend to the academic, physical, mental, social, and emotional needs of children. They embrace this diverse role recognizing nonacademic factors that go unaddressed during the school day can affect students' well-being and therefore their academic achievement. Since schools are already woven into the social fabric of every community, they are strategically positioned to provide additional services.

Yet even when their health, emotional, and social needs are met, students, particularly educationally disadvantaged students, can often benefit from additional instruction time and participation in other enriching activities. Expanding learning time, or lengthening the school day, week, or year, for all children in a school can help close academic and enrichment gaps. Rather than just tacking time onto the calendar, expanding learning time involves strategically redesigning the school schedule to incorporate extra time for academic instruction, enrichment activities, and professional development and planning for staff.

Schools across the country are experimenting with a community-school model and the expansion of learning time. There are hundreds of community schools in 44 states and the District of Columbia.¹ And there are 655 schools with an expanded calendar in 36 states and the District of Columbia.² Yet few schools have taken on the task of implementing both reforms at once.

There are hurdles to implementing a school model that expands the school calendar with wraparound social services for students and their community. Funding is a major obstacle when expanding learning time or implementing community support services. Often schools struggle to blend a mixture of funding streams from various sources—philanthropic; city, district, state, and federal grants; private contributions; and money from community-based organizations—to initiate and maintain services. But as both reform models gain momentum by demonstrating success, more funding opportunities are becoming available. The Obama administration has proposed substantial investments in both models as part of its broader federal education reform agenda. In addition, local, state, and nonfederal national funding streams that can be applied towards both reform efforts are becoming increasingly available.

With the availability of more funding, schools may want to consider how expanding learning time can work hand in hand with a community schools model. Although the reforms are distinct and schools have had successes without coupling the reforms, schools that expand learning time and schools that utilize existing community resources to open up the school's assets both transcend the conventional models of schooling.

Indeed, in many respects these two reforms complement each other. Dr. Gloria Santiago, chairperson of the board of trustees at LEAP Academy University Charter School in New Jersey, which expanded the school day and year in addition to providing support services, says that “the combination of an expanded day and the multiservice community school model... enables students to succeed because it allows the school time to support the development of the whole student—not just his or her academic success.”³

This report will examine three schools that have implemented the combined community school model and an expanded school calendar. The first two are elementary schools in Chicago, Marquette Elementary and John C. Burroughs Elementary, both located in neighborhoods that face issues of high poverty and large immigrant populations. The third is a charter school in Camden, NJ, LEAP Academy University Charter School, which is also located in a high-poverty community.

Marquette Elementary, which serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade, provides evening programming to adults and community members and runs a health clinic at the school offering both physical and mental health services. The evening programs are a decade old; the health clinic was open in 2009. Also in 2009 the school redesigned the school day and expanded by one hour for all middle school students, students in grades six through eight. The schedule for the elementary school, kindergarten to fifth grade, was not expanded.

Burroughs Elementary provides evening programming until 8 p.m. every weeknight to students, families, and community members, a community service offered for more than a decade. It also partners with a local nonprofit organization to provide mental health services to the community. In addition, the school day at Burroughs was lengthened by one hour for all students almost a decade ago.

Camden's LEAP Academy opened in 1997 with a longer school day and year, as well as providing support services in partnership with nearby Rutgers University. The school day runs from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. for all students and the school year is 200 days. Support services are provided at the school's seven Centers of

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Excellence including health and other social services, pre-college office, teacher development and performance, early education and child care, parents' academy, law clinic, and the family support center.⁴ In addition LEAP offers evening programming to community members every weekday from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

At each of these three schools the overarching goal is improving the lives of children by catering to their academic and nonacademic needs.

This paper will not examine all services offered at community schools, or all the ways that schools with an expanded calendar use time. Rather than being prescriptive in how to launch these reform efforts, aspects of the services provided at the three schools will be highlighted to show how support services and an expanded day work in conjunction to break the mold of conventional schooling.

As explored later in this paper, various federal, state, and local funding streams for implementing both a community-school and expanded-learning-time-model exist. In addition there are several pieces of pending legislation that if passed will expand funding options. These funding streams lay the foundation of support necessary to implement support services or expand the school schedule. Using this foundation, combined with dedicated school leaders, we can shift the way we conceptualize the school model to support students and raise achievement.

The report urges policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels of government to take action to enable these reforms to proceed more broadly across our country. Specifically, we will urge:

- The White House and the Department of Education to expand funding and broaden the scope of federal education initiatives by implementing community schools and expanded learning time programs at the nation's lowest-performing schools, including through the Race to the Top program, School Improvement Grants, Investing in Innovation Fund, Full Service Community Schools Program, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program
- Congress to pass legislation to increase funding for community schools and expanded learning initiatives and other education reforms, including reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passage of the Full Service Community Schools Act, Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act, and Developing Innovative Partnerships and Learning Opportunities that Motivate Achievement Act

- State and local governments to follow the lead of Massachusetts’s Expanding Learning Time Initiative and Illinois’s grants for community schools, as well as establish programs providing funding, resources, and support for community schools and expanded learning time programs

We are confident that after reading this report and seriously considering our recommendations, policymakers in Congress and in the Obama administration will recognize the positive, life-changing impacts community schools and expanded learning time models can have on students, their families, and their communities.

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