



Redesigning and Expanding School Time to Support Common Core Implementation

By David A. Farbman, David J. Goldberg, and Tiffany D. Miller

January 2014

Introduction and summary

With the widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards, public education in the United States is poised to take a major step forward in readying the next generation of Americans for success in higher education and the workforce. Implementation of the standards, as currently planned in 45 states and the District of Columbia, also means that the vast majority of students will soon be held to the highest set of English language arts and math literacy expectations in U.S. history.¹ Many education reforms have had the potential to help propel students toward future success, but adoption of the Common Core State Standards is poised to be the most significant education reform in decades, because it is the nation's first attempt to provide a comprehensive roadmap for educators to help them bring all children to college and career readiness. Therefore, it is fundamentally important that its implementation is thoughtful and precise. Educators and students will need to implement a variety of strategies to meet the sharp rise in expectations for teaching and learning. Redesigning schools with significantly more time for both student learning and teacher professional development and collaboration is one significant way to make certain that Common Core implementation is successful.

Gaining a realistic understanding of students' performance levels, meeting students where they currently are, and raising them to new heights are the tasks at hand and will require more intensive and time-consuming teaching and learning than schools commonly provide now. Disadvantaged students—often low-income students, students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities—were frequently held to a lower set of standards in the past and will need the greatest focus. They are also the students who benefit the most from well-designed schools that use significantly more and better learning time for both students and teachers. Americans' willingness to break out of the box of the 180-day, 6.5 hours-per-day school schedule can help with the transition to the Common Core State Standards, especially when targeting schools serving high concentrations of disadvantaged students.

Fortunately, federal and state policies that support efforts to increase the amount of time students spend in school are resulting in new resources—and freeing up formerly restricted resources—to fund the creation of more expanded-time schools. For instance, two major federal programs, School Improvement Grants, or SIG, and Race to the Top, both include increased learning time as integral to school turnaround efforts. The Obama administration also created more flexibility for high-quality, expanded learning time schools in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, flexibility waivers initiative as part of both Title I and Supplemental Educational Services, or SES, reform and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which had previously been restricted to only out-of-school time programming. At the state level, laws in New York, Florida, Illinois, and Arizona have dedicated funding to increase school time. In addition, laws focused on turning around low-performing schools in Connecticut, Colorado, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Washington state, and several other states grant districts and schools new authority to redesign their daily and yearly schedules around expanded school time and to shift budgets to support the operational and staffing changes such an effort involves.

These policies, the flexibility and autonomy to repurpose existing funding streams, and new sources of revenue have spurred a rapidly growing movement for expanded learning time schools at a moment when they can play a leading role in the successful implementation of the Common Core. Hundreds of schools—both traditional district and public charter schools, most of which serve significant populations of low-income children—have proven that by expanding learning time, they can broaden and deepen academic content, integrate innovative instructional methods into classrooms, individualize student supports, and furnish teachers with dedicated sessions for collaboration and instructional improvement. As schools now adapt their teaching and learning to the Common Core framework, these expanded-time schools are well-positioned to enable their students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve at even higher levels.

The Center for American Progress and the National Center on Time & Learning believe that expanded learning time provides both teachers and students with one of the critical tools that they need to meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards. Of course, the additional learning time must be well planned and intentional. High-performing expanded-time schools give teachers more time for ongoing professional development and collaboration, and offer students more

time to reach the higher expectations for English language arts and math. We strongly encourage states, districts, and schools to consider the benefits of expanding the school day or year to support teachers and students. As such, we offer the following recommendations:

- National, state, and local education policymakers, educators, and philanthropic leaders should recognize and include the important issue of learning time as they plan strategies for successful Common Core implementation.
- States and districts should pass legislation and enact policies that are school-redesign friendly, empowering schools to lengthen and redesign the school day and year for transition to the Common Core.
- States, districts, and schools should use existing federal and state resources to fund high-quality expanded learning time school models.
- Districts and schools should increase the amount of time teachers have for collaboration and professional development during the school day and year and beyond as the Common Core transition takes place.
- States and districts should target expanded learning time to schools serving high concentrations of disadvantaged students.
- Schools should be intentional with schedule redesign plans to make certain that more time in school is used effectively to avoid simply doing “more of the same.”
- National teacher and education reform organization should collect and share best practices and innovative models of teachers union collective bargaining agreements that enable expanded time in school.

As states transition to the Common Core, it is imperative that the implementation of these new standards include policies and supports that increase the amount of time teachers have for collaboration and professional development and the amount of time students spend in school learning the new standards. Meeting the demands associated with the Common Core will be a challenge, but high-quality expanded learning time is one of the most far-reaching implementation strategies and can enable students to successfully meet these higher expectations.

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.”

The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) (www.timeandlearning.org) is dedicated to expanding learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education. Through research, public policy, and technical assistance, NCTL supports national, state, and local initiatives that add significantly more school time to help children meet the demands of the 21st century.

