

Forum Brief

Envisioning a Different School Day: How Boston and New York Are Using Expanded Learning Time Forum – Friday, May 14, 2010

This forum showcased two models for expanded learning time in traditional public schools. The Expanded Learning Time Initiative (ELT) in Massachusetts redesigns the school schedule to include an additional 300 hours per year for all students in participating schools. The additional time focuses on increased instructional time, enrichment opportunities (often provided by community-based organizations) and teacher professional development and planning time. Alternatively, Expanded Learning Time/New York City (ELT/NYC), developed by The After-School Corporation (TASC), partners schools with community-based organizations (CBOs) to extend the traditional school day by three hours and expand learning time by 30% for participating students.

Jennifer Davis, Co-founder and President of Massachusetts 2020 (Mass 2020) and President and CEO of the National Center on Time & Learning, began the discussion by citing four emerging issues of concern responsible for the current movement to expand learning time and extend the school day/year: the unrelenting achievement gap, the narrowing of the curriculum in schools because of increased time for math and English, the need to enhance teacher quality, and the need to improve the international competitiveness of our schools. Davis argued that the traditional school calendar of 180, 6.5-hour school days is not enough time for students to achieve proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA), math, and other core subjects; to support teachers and improve their instruction; and to equip students with the 21st Century skills they need to succeed in higher education and/or a career. Due to time constraints and the pressures of No Child Left Behind, many public schools have narrowed the curriculum by cutting time spent on science, social studies, art, music and PE by one-third, reducing students' exposure to problem-solving, teamwork, communication and other advantageous skills. Additionally, surveys of 153,000 teachers in seven states, found that they do not have enough instructional time with students to adequately meet their needs. A number of schools that are succeeding, such as the those run by the three highest performing charter school networks in the United States—KIPP, Achievement First and Uncommon Schools—have implemented a “more time” model as a means of addressing and resolving these issues, adding at least 350 hours to the traditional school year.

The Massachusetts ELT Initiative, a partnership between Mass 2020 and the Massachusetts governor, legislature, and state department of education, has incorporated key lessons drawn from Mass 2020's work on expanding and improving afterschool programs and from successful “more time” charter school models to redesign low performing district schools. The ELT model calls for the addition of 300 school hours to be spent on core academics, enrichment, and teacher development and planning. Started in 2005, it currently serves more than 12,000 students at 22 competitively selected schools in 11 districts in Massachusetts. The state legislature provides \$1,300 per child to support the initiative. While the Massachusetts model allows schools to add 300 hours through any combination of longer days, weekend classes, or a longer school year, thus far all participating schools have chosen to create a longer day.

Since its implementation, ELT has spurred significant gains in student achievement and engagement opportunities, benefited teachers, and satisfied parents. In the past year alone, students at ELT schools gained proficiency in English Language Arts and math at double the rate of the state average; the gains in science are five times the rate of the state average. In several ELT middle schools, student gains in ELA and math narrowed the achievement gap by at least 50% in just two years. By working with community partners, ELT has also provided students with a diverse and exciting array of experiential learning opportunities. More than 150 organizations, including museums, universities, YMCAs, and arts and health organizations currently work with ELT schools to help students build new skills, develop broader interests, and increase engagement in school.

Teachers at ELT schools have responded positively to the extended school time as well; 70% acknowledge ELT's positive impact on students and at least 50% indicate now having enough time to complete the curriculum and meet the needs of all students. Parents with children in ELT schools express similar satisfaction with the longer school day, as 77% of them espouse that extra time in school has resulted in academic gains for their children.

Corbett Coutts, the Assistant Principal of Mario Umana Middle School Academy in East Boston, spoke of his school's experience with ELT. At the Umana, 85-90% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch and lack the many resources and opportunities available to students attending schools in more affluent communities. The Umana applied to become an ELT school in an effort to close the existing achievement and opportunity gap and build cultural capital within the school. The Umana, along with two other public middle schools in Boston, was ultimately selected to pilot the ELT model. Because the school schedule was changed from a 1:30 pm end time to a 4:30 pm end time, all 700 students in the school benefit from the expanded schedule.

Coutts described four key aspects to successfully implementing ELT at Umana: getting buy-in from constituency groups, managing staffing issues, integrating partner organizations, and institutionalizing the longer school day. He also acknowledged that initial reactions to ELT implementation varied among different constituency groups. Students, reluctant at first to stay at school longer than they were accustomed to, quickly adapted and began to appreciate the opportunities and experiences they gained on account of the extended school day. Parents and families also responded positively and are pleased with the additional hours of childcare provided by ELT as well as the enrichment experiences afforded their children.

School staff were more cautious about ELT and expressed concerns about compensation and having their workday extended beyond school hours. In response, Boston Teachers Union and Boston Public Schools reached a collective bargaining agreement that made extended time required for all incoming provisional teachers and voluntary for all permanent teachers and other personnel. Those who chose to stay and participate in the extended learning hours were compensated at the contractual hourly rate.

CBOs, also concerned about ELT and its potential to render their services obsolete, discovered instead the opportunity to more fully integrate with the school. While before ELT they were

often ancillary to the Umana, they became part of the school community and involved in decision-making and professional development at the school site. CBOs partnering with the Umana also gained access to school resources such as security and school nurses and were able to bypass the standard challenge of recruiting and retaining student participants in their programs. In order to manage partner relationships and ensure integration efforts ran smoothly between the Umana and the diverse set of CBOs and outside organizations with which they partnered, Coutts served as the liaison between the school and its community partners and was the point person for all ELT matters.

As Coutts concluded his discussion of the Umana, Davis addressed the growing national momentum behind expanding learning time in schools. She acknowledged that while leaders in 30 states have already expressed interest in launching initiatives to expand learning time in low-performing, high-poverty schools, the development of such programs relies heavily on the availability of federal funding. Legislation to provide such funding has already been introduced to the U.S. Senate via the Time for Innovation Matters in Education (TIME) Act¹ and in an identical companion bill in the House. Funds may also be made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's support for dramatic turnaround efforts in the lowest performing public schools through the implementation of "increased learning time" models.

Saskia Traill, Policy Director at TASC, provided an overview of the organization and the ELT/NYC model. TASC began in 1998 with the initial goal of building a quality afterschool system in New York City (NYC); in 2008, TASC launched the ELT/NYC model in response to calls for more learning time and the growing body of research on afterschool showing the importance of principal engagement and time in driving student outcomes. ELT/NYC is currently being piloted at 10 school sites in NYC and consists of several core elements. ELT/NYC: increases learning time for participating students by 30%; is school-based; is led by the principal; is in partnership with a lead CBO; offers students diverse and engaging learning opportunities; requires collaboration and communication among administrators, teachers, and CBO staff; and meets cost and sustainability models. The current cost of ELT/NYC is \$1,600 per student per year.

Valerie Sawinski, Principal of Edward Bleeker Junior High School 185 (JHS 185) in Flushing, New York, spoke of her school's experience as an ELT/NYC pilot school. JHS 185 is a Title I school where 60% of students come from economically disadvantaged families. Prior to becoming an ELT/NYC school, JHS 185 had a close relationship with Child Center of New York, a CBO that provided clinical social workers to counsel parents and students at the school. JHS 185 thus collaborated with Child Center of New York to write its ELT/NYC proposal. The 2008-2009 school year was JHS 185's first year as an ELT/NYC school, during which 20% of its students participated in the program and gained access to 3 hours of extended learning time per day. In an attempt to encourage attendance and establish a connection between the extended hours and the traditional school day, JHS 185 changed its school day from 8 to 11 periods. Periods 9-11 currently run from 2:20 until 5:20 and consist of ELT courses.

JHS 185's goal as an ELT/NYC school is to, "Engage the entire school community to grow intellectually, develop team spirit, and expand future horizons." To accomplish this goal, they

¹ <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-3431>

worked closely with a CBO liaison staffed within the school to determine which courses would be offered during periods 9-11 and who would instruct. Following a “tasting fair” during which students can try out a number of the different offerings, students choose which activities they want to attend and are obligated to stick with their selection for five months. This approach holds students accountable for the choices they make while simultaneously giving them adequate time to develop mastery in a specific area. In addition to participating in an activity of their choice, all students are required to attend Homework Help for 45 minutes daily.

Sawinski noted the positive impact on academics, discipline, and attendance that ELT/NYC has had on students participating in the program. The percentage of students failing a major subject class among ELT students was almost 10% less than non-ELT students for the 2008-2009 school year, while 58% of ELT students increased their proficiency rating on the State ELA test. Sawinski attributed the academic improvement shown by ELT students in part to the collaboration that took place among school educators and CBO staff. Sawinski also suggested that ELT students demonstrated increased maturity on account of their participation in the program. According to Sawinski, 80% of this group significantly improved their behavior and their suspension rate decreased by 53%. Attendance among ELT students reflected greater engagement in school compared to their non-ELT counterparts as fewer than 10% of ELT students logged 10 or more absences for the 2008-2009 school year compared to almost 20% of non-ELT students.

While disappointed that funding only allowed for 20% of the 1,100 students at JHS 185 to participate in ELT/NYC, Sawinski lauded the program as a step toward achieving equity for her students with regard to the enrichment opportunities and activities ELT/NYC offered. Traill responded to Sawinski’s frustration that ELT/NYC did not accommodate more students and acknowledged that none of the 10 pilot sites were currently “whole school,” but that half the schools are currently serving more than 70% of students. ELT/NYC plans to expand to 10 additional sites next year, increasing the number of ELT/NYC schools from 10 to 20; TASC would like the model to eventually include all students at all participating schools.

Traill proceeded to speak on what ELT/NYC has learned from its 10 pilot sites and the challenges it continues to face. Traill cited the unique relationship ELT/NYC fosters between schools and their lead CBOs as a critical component of ELT/NYC’s success. When in-school and afterschool staff collaborate, student attendance and academic gains increase. Additionally, ELT/NYC schools have experienced an increase in parental engagement in students’ education and participation in school events. Data collected from tests evaluating proficiency rates in ELA and math also indicate a positive trend of improvement at ELT/NYC schools compared to peer schools not involved in the ELT program. ELT/NYC is currently working on partnering with an external evaluator to more thoroughly assess the program and its impact on participating students and schools.

According to Traill, the biggest challenge ELT/NYC faces is funding. While utilizing a multitude of funding sources, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) and Title I, 10-20% of ELT/NYC’s funding at each school site comes directly out of the school’s budget. As previously indicated, inadequate funding prevents ELT/NYC from going “whole school.” Other challenges to the program include late-day bussing for students and creating

adequate time and space for collaborative planning and professional development for CBO and school staff.

Trill concluded with a number of policy recommendations for continuing the growth and development of ELT programs nationally. Expanding ELT models relies on the continuance of 21st CCLC funding and on encouraging integrated academic and enrichment programs led by community partners to be included in Title I funding. Finally, she stressed the importance of embracing and developing community partnerships with schools to increase opportunities for learning and enrichment for students.

Question and Answer Period

Another question was raised regarding how classroom teachers were compensated when the school day was extended. Davis explained that in Massachusetts, compensation was negotiated by teachers unions and individual districts and therefore varied from district to district. Trill responded that in NYC, ELT schools paid teachers the standard contractual per-session rate for each hour of extended time they worked.

Coutts responded to a question asked about how data sharing between CBOs and schools could be advanced without violating current privacy laws explaining that in Massachusetts, CBOs that sign contracts with schools receive full access to student data. Sawinski explained that JHS 185 addressed privacy issues by including a parental release in the application to participate in the ELT program. Trill added that CBOs working with ELT/NYC schools used the same student identifiers in their data systems to allow for aggregated student data from the CBOs and schools.

A question raised by a representative of the SEED school in Washington DC asked about available data on successful ELT schedules and models. Davis directed interested parties to the Massachusetts 2020 website—<http://www.mass2020.org>—for information on several case studies of ELT schools and an overview of promising practices and lessons learned. Coutts related one challenge Umana faced as an ELT school is offering CBO-run courses during extended school hours only due to the fact that many CBO staff work part-time. He recommended moving toward a model that utilizes more full-time CBO staff who work throughout the school day in order to take advantage of community resources such as museums that allow for off-site visits during regular school hours.