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# Off the Clock: What More Time Can (and Can't) Do for School Turnarounds

By Elena Silva



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In a back-to-school visit to his hometown of Chicago last fall, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan applauded his successors for accomplishing something he had always wanted to: adding time to the school day. “We were unable to do this before, but [we] should have,” Duncan said of his efforts as school superintendent to give Chicago students more time on task.<sup>1</sup> In the years since, Duncan’s promotion of extended learning time (ELT) has been embraced not just by Chicago leaders but by policy leaders and advocates nationwide who say that today’s students, particularly impoverished ones, cannot possibly get everything they need to succeed within the traditional 6.5-hour school day and the 180-day school year.

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Their arguments have been persuasive. Despite unprecedented cuts to public education budgets, support and funding for ELT have grown considerably in the past several years. Advocates cite studies showing that, compared to wealthier peers whose afternoons are filled with enriching and educational activities, poor children have limited access to quality learning outside of school. It’s a pattern that begins in their earliest years and accumulates through high school.<sup>2</sup> ELT, they say, can close that opportunity gap.

Now, with the support of influential policymakers like Secretary Duncan, ELT is becoming one of the most widely used strategies for fixing the nation’s worst public schools. Billions of federal stimulus dollars are currently being spent to expand learning time on behalf of disadvantaged children.<sup>3</sup> Congressional leaders working to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) have proposed making ELT a core strategy for school turnaround. The U.S. Department of Education’s parallel effort to give states waivers from the current version of ESEA also includes a major bet on ELT.

But the hard truth is that there is far more research showing the ill effects of unequal time than research showing that ELT policies can make up the difference. Less time may be a cause of poor performance, but that doesn’t mean that more time is necessarily

the cure. Indeed, despite the fact that ELT was first recommended almost 20 years ago by a federally commissioned task force, it has never been systematically tracked or widely studied.<sup>4</sup> And what research does exist shows that it has had only small positive effects on student achievement.

There are strong reasons to fear that the current wave of federal ELT policymaking will show similarly meager results. In 2011, Education Sector conducted a comprehensive analysis of applications for funding from the stimulus-based School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, which was designed to improve the nation’s worst schools. More than 90 percent of all SIG grantees chose a school improvement strategy that incorporates ELT.<sup>5</sup> Some of the applicants described comprehensive, well-designed strategies to substantially increase student learning time and use that time well. But others included strategies like—absurdly—shaving a few minutes off recess and lunch and redirecting them to “instruction.” Far too many SIG grantees showed a lack of capacity—the staff, the structures, the funds—to gain enough time to make a difference or to use that time well.

None of this is to say that ELT cannot work. But schools that have succeeded with extended time have done so largely because they include time as part of a more comprehensive reform. In Massachusetts, a

leader in ELT, schools must commit to redesigning their entire educational program—including staffing, labor agreements, compensation, and scheduling—to receive state ELT funds.<sup>6</sup> These schools are not just adding time to compensate for what they lack; they are integrating time into an overall model for successful teaching and learning.

Most of the schools that are pursuing ELT under new federal programs, however, are not using this approach. They are choosing technical compliance with federal rules instead of the hard work of comprehensive reform. And federal policymakers are not insisting that they do otherwise. The result could be worse than merely ineffective. These schools are by definition among the nation’s worst-performing—characterized by struggling students, chronic absenteeism, and inexperienced staffs. Demanding that teachers work more hours in such an environment threatens to repel rather than attract the very educators these schools need.

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The best ELT plans have real potential to improve student learning. But many of today’s ELT adopters, constrained by limited and temporary funds, are effectively favoring quantity over quality. And they have no plans for sustaining even their modest ambitions. The inevitable result of these shortcomings will be failure: a promising movement fades, improvement strategies falter, teachers get fed up and leave. New designs for extended time *should* be a part of the nation’s school improvement plans. But policymakers and school leaders must recognize that successful schools use time not just to extend hours and days but to creatively improve how and by whom

instruction is delivered. In the end, the ELT movement is more likely to leave a legacy of school and student success if it becomes less about time and more about quality teaching and learning.

## What Time Can and Can’t Do

It is widely believed that today’s school calendar is based on agrarian time, when children needed to be out of school long enough to help with seasonal planting. That is only partly true. Urban school calendars have shortened over time, reduced from almost year-round schedules in the 19th century. And rural schools typically operated for six months, split seasonally. But it was not farming that led to the roughly 180-day school year. Our current calendar was mostly a result of well-intentioned efforts to create common schedules—a blend of urban and rural that would align with the compulsory attendance laws that states were quickly adopting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>7</sup>

Today, school time is still defined by states, which require a minimum number of days to make up a school year and a minimum amount of instructional minutes or hours to count as a school day. Some states leave it up to districts to define minimum daily time, but most require between three and six and a half hours.<sup>8</sup> The states also usually decide what counts as instructional hours and what doesn’t, and those determinations vary widely. Some states, for instance, count passing periods, lunch, assemblies, and assessments as instructional time, while others discount one or all of these.

But requirements don’t always equate to student success. A simple correlation analysis of state time policies and achievement scores finds that states that require more time don’t perform any better or worse than those that require less or don’t set requirements.<sup>9</sup> This is not surprising, given what we know about the relationship between time and learning. There is an enormous difference between time that is technically allocated for instruction and time spent authentically engaging students in learning. Studies have found no significant positive relationship between the amount of mere “allocated” time and student achievement.<sup>10</sup> Put simply, not all time in school has the same impact on learning. While this may be obvious to educators who struggle to balance time spent directing and

disciplining students with time spent actually teaching them, it is a significant practical consideration for education leaders and policymakers. In effect, there is no clear measure for how any time, much less additional time, is being used in schools. But it is safe to say that many schools are using time inefficiently and that adding time would not change this.

That is not to say that schools don't need more time. Research is clear on another point—that there is a wide gap in access to learning opportunities between poor children and their more affluent peers. In large part, the gap is created in the hours outside of school, time during which well-resourced students are enrolled in or exposed to a range of activities—from dance and swimming lessons to karate and robotics classes—while low-income students are watching television, caring for siblings, and working. More time in school, then, means less time for these differences to add up and matter.

But the opportunity gap isn't restricted to out-of-school time. Poor children are more likely to attend schools with less experienced teachers, more leader and staff turnover, cultures of low expectation, and overall records of failure. Given these handicaps, it makes sense for the nation to focus on improving the lowest-performing schools—the priority that is codified in current and proposed federal law as well as in the Obama administration's waiver plan. It also makes sense to emphasize extending time as a component of school designs that serve poor children equitably. But more time in itself is not enough to counter the sobering reality that these lowest-performing schools just don't have the people they need.

A look at schools currently using ELT bears this out. Roughly 1,000 public schools in the nation are now operating with extended schedules, according to the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL), meaning that they have added at least 30 minutes to their schedules each day. Although they include a number of traditional public schools, more than 60 percent of them are charter schools. Most serve high percentages of poor and minority students and English-language learners. And many reflect the best of what ELT can be: their vision is not limited to time, and they have the capacity and support to make that vision work.

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In Massachusetts, the ELT initiative led by the state advocacy group Mass 2020 received its sixth round of state funding in 2011 despite deep cuts to the state education budget.<sup>11</sup> The money supports 19 public schools in nine districts, each receiving \$1,300 a year per student for 300 hours of additional time and a redesign of the school's academic program. To win the state funds, as well as technical assistance from Mass 2020, schools must prove that they are capable of adding time in thoughtful and strategic ways. The NCTL database also includes schools that belong to successful charter networks, including KIPP, Uncommon Schools, Achievement First, and YES Prep. All are organizations that are premised on the belief that more time is essential for delivering high-quality education to low-income children.

But there is a whole other world of schools planning to extend time—schools that are adding time because they are being pushed by federal policymakers. The U.S. Department of Education is investing \$3.5 billion over three years through the SIG program to improve the country's lowest-performing 5 percent of schools, and more than 90 percent of them are selecting one of the two models—"turnaround" and "transformation"—that mandate more time.<sup>12</sup> That translates into 4,000 schools and roughly 2 million students.

According to the Education Commission of the States and NCTL, the SIG program represents the largest public funding stream available to support more time.<sup>13</sup> And it is not likely to be the only one. In the Senate bill reauthorizing ESEA, extended time shows up as an alternative to Supplemental Education Services (SES), the federal program that offers free out-of-school tutoring to low-income students through community providers.<sup>14</sup> (Most studies of SES find few, if any, positive effects on student achievement, but strong support from parents, many of whom rely on SES to keep their children busy while they work.)

Extended time is also an option in the federal government’s 21st Century Community Learning Center program, another out-of-school initiative. Under proposed changes, district leaders could use 21CCLC funds to extend learning time in school rather than, or in addition to, starting out-of-school programs.<sup>15</sup> Support for ELT as a key “school turnaround principle” also figures into the administration’s waiver plan to excuse states from the accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in exchange for acceptable state-led reforms.

## A Question of Capacity

The Department of Education defines “increased learning time” as the use of a longer school day, week, or year to significantly boost the number of school hours for core academic subjects as well for other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to “a well-rounded education.”<sup>16</sup> According to this definition, extended time must be available to all students, not just to a targeted group, and schools must provide teachers with additional time to “collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects.” Borrowing from Mass 2020 guidelines, the federal government also asserts that an ELT schedule should increase a school schedule by at least 300 hours and require more time for teacher planning and development.

This is a tall order, especially for the schools receiving the federal SIG funds. Compared to schools

nationwide, these schools are more likely to be in urban neighborhoods and to have high-minority, high-poverty student populations.<sup>17</sup> Their teachers are more apt to be new and teaching a subject or grade outside their area of expertise.<sup>18</sup> Despite the difficulty of the job, they have little support, and they work in a pervasive culture—among staff and students alike—of low expectations. In the vernacular of education policy, these schools are “hard to staff.” In the words of teachers, they are toxic.

Imagine, then, that you teach in one of these schools, and you are informed of a new set of reforms that includes longer days and a longer year. You are not convinced that this reform plan, which isn’t the first and isn’t likely to be the last, will transform the school. You are certain, however, that it will make your hard job even harder. Meanwhile, just a few miles down the road, a nice suburban school faces only a fraction of your problems, it pays more and, more important, it doesn’t need to extend its hours. Unlike most of your students, you have the choice to leave. As with half of teachers at the difficult schools, you do.<sup>19</sup>

This typical reaction explains why, although the significance of teachers for student learning is now well-documented and accepted, adding time to the nation’s worst schools is not drawing good teachers in and may even be pushing them away. Indeed, with some notable exceptions, the move to extend time in low-performing schools doesn’t include much attention to how it will staff this extra time, now and in years to come, or how it will ensure that more time is any better than existing time. A school’s plans to add time, then, can have little or nothing to do with the long list of other turnaround requirements, like assessing and replacing teachers, improving staff evaluation and professional development, using student data to inform instruction, and adopting whole new governance structures. For these schools, supported by an infusion of new funds but not much else, the most practical approach is the easiest one. Adding time, more than revising curriculum, or altering staff recruitment and hiring, or putting a new evaluation system in place, seems simple. But like money, time is only a resource; whether it will help children learn depends on how it is used.

So what are schools, tasked with extending learning, doing with more time? Education Sector has analyzed the available data on schools that have extended

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time, including a sample of SIG grantees and the database from the NCTL.<sup>20</sup> We find that schools are taking a wide range of approaches to extending learning time, and that the efforts are organized loosely within three main designs: adding time to the formal school schedule, expanding learning outside of the regular school schedule, and changing the way time is used within the school day.<sup>21</sup> What follows is a look at each of these designs. Some show clear potential, while others face considerable limits to implementation.

## Adding Time to the School Day

Adding minutes or hours to the school day, while it is perhaps the most straightforward and familiar way of extending time, is actually the least common approach among SIG grantees, largely because it is expensive and typically means changing teacher work schedules. On average, schools that pursued this option added roughly 70 minutes to each day, or 210 hours to their year—well short of those 300-plus hours recommended by the federal government.

Two notable exceptions are Burke Alternative School West in Morgantown, N.C., which merged with an alternative high school and added 180 minutes a day four days a week, primarily for students to make up lost credits, and Grandview Middle School, in the lower Yakima Valley of Washington, which extended its day by 90 minutes four days a week in an effort to double the time that nearly every student spends on math. Students at Grandview Middle are glad for the extra time. “It just feels like we’re getting more,” said 13-year-old Melissa Ramos.<sup>22</sup> And they are. Like the other dozen SIG schools in the Yakima Valley, each receiving between \$50,000 and \$2 million for up to three years, Grandview is spending huge amounts of its SIG funds to supplement teacher salaries—the most expensive item in any school budget—as well as on additional staff, outside consultants, and student transportation.

One of the biggest success stories of ELT is, not surprisingly, in Massachusetts.<sup>23</sup> Matthew J. Kuss Middle School in Fall River has transformed itself from the first in the state to be declared “chronically underperforming” in 2004 to a school that is not even eligible for SIG funds today. Since adopting an added-time schedule in 2006, Kuss gives all its

students 30 percent more time in school (including on Saturdays) and provides additional development time for teachers, almost all of whom have increased their work hours: instructors now have nine individual planning periods, a grade-level meeting, and at least one curriculum meeting each week.

While the regular day’s curriculum is dictated by the district, Kuss Principal Nancy Mullen explains, the ELT curriculum is decided by the teachers “so it’s aligned with standards but also meets the real needs of our students and gets delivered in a much more engaging and project-based way.” Mullen says more time isn’t the only reason for the school’s success, but it’s a big one. Significantly, this kind of time carries a big price: teacher salaries at Kuss increased by 25 percent. Without state funding for ELT, Mullen isn’t sure how she would fund those increases; the budget is now about \$800,000 annually for teachers and other staff costs alone. But she says she would try.

While these expenses are covered for SIG schools in the short term, financially strapped districts are unsure of how they will pay for more time three years from now, when the SIG money runs out. Indeed, the personnel costs alone of extending time are estimated to be *at least* \$1,300 more per student per year. And temporary bonuses for teachers to work extra hours are not the answer; districts that pay teachers more to teach in high-poverty, low-performing schools have found limited success with bonuses, even up to \$25,000 and even within the regular school schedule.<sup>24</sup> Paying teachers for extra time usually also means revising contracts, a process often marked by arduous union negotiations. In Chicago, the recent push for ELT was initially rejected outright by the teachers union, which balked at a 2 percent raise in exchange for teaching 20 percent more time. “Thanks but no thanks,” said union president Karen Lewis.<sup>25</sup> Negotiations between district and union were so tense that they led to intervention by the state labor relations board and the state attorney’s office.

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Houston is also trying a districtwide approach to adding time, hoping it will help turn around its lowest-performing schools. These so-called “Apollo 20” schools are adding an hour to each day and a week to each year. Although they are district schools, they are openly borrowing from successful charter groups like KIPP, listing more time as one of five tenets of success. (The other four are an effective staffing plan, data-driven instruction, intensive tutoring, and a culture of high expectations.) The district’s plan was initiated by Harvard economist Roland Fryer, who says his aim is “to boil down charter school successes into translatable, scalable practices for public schools.”<sup>26</sup> The Apollo 20 plan also enjoys substantial outside support; the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, is paying for two-year bonuses for teachers, and other private and government grants provide the schools with an extra \$2,000 per student.

A less expensive, and less controversial, staffing option is to stagger teacher schedules so the total number of hours worked by each teacher is the same but the schedule for students is lengthened. The Generation Schools foundation has successfully taken this approach in its flagship school in Brooklyn, N.Y., which it opened in 2007 through a partnership between the New York City Department of Education and the union. Last year, the foundation took its “all hands on deck” model, where teachers all serve multiple roles in staggered shifts, to Denver. In January, the Denver Board of Education voted to allow Generation Schools to implement its design at two academy schools at the former Denver West High School. As they do in Brooklyn, the schools will have tremendous autonomy over scheduling, budget, and professional development.

By contrast, most SIG schools are tasked with making huge changes but not trusted to manage themselves with any greater degree of freedom.<sup>27</sup> Two of Delaware’s SIG schools, Stubbs Elementary School and Glasgow High School, both in the Christina School District, are trying the staff-staggering approach but not as part of any larger innovation strategy. Both schools are staggering teachers’ daily start and end times so they can add an extra hour a day for all students. (The work day for staff does not exceed the agreed-upon 7.5 hours.)

## Expanding Time Outside of School

The most common single ELT approach is extending learning outside of the regular school schedule, an approach that avoids much of the cost and controversy of paying for and restructuring teacher’s work. In some ways, it is like adding traditional after-school, Saturday, and summer programs. For one thing, it preempts complaints from parents who prefer the regular school schedule; if they don’t want their children to stay after school, they don’t have to. Although the federal government requires that grantees who provide time in this manner make it available to all students, it does not actually require that students use it. Schools, then, typically target expanded learning time programs to struggling students during out-of-school hours or in the summer.

In Philadelphia, for example, the Summer Learning and More (SLAM) program, a 22-day session of intensive reading and math instruction, is how South Philadelphia High School plans to use its SIG money to expand time. Teachers, too, can opt in or out of most expanded learning plans. In Carson City, Nev., for instance, Eagle Valley Middle School is staggering schedules for a handful of willing teachers who will start later in the morning and work later in the afternoon to run an intervention program for struggling students. (As a SIG grantee, Eagle Valley is offering after-school programs, staffed by teachers and paraprofessionals, for all of its students.)

But make no mistake: there is nothing simple about expanding time outside of the school schedule. Almost all of the schools with plans to extend time in this way rely on a community partner, an “external provider,” or both, and most of them require additional staff, often volunteers or members of a public service corps.<sup>28</sup>

Coordinating partners is an immense task, one that often exceeds the capacity of school administrators. So an intermediary must often step in, to manage staff and coordinate funds. There is a cost to this, as well.

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One such intermediary, The Providence After School Association (PASA), raises more than \$2 million annually from a mix of local, state, federal, and private funds. PASA is also the reason why that city has such a robust program for expanded learning. One of a handful of its SIG schools, Roger Williams Middle, is expanding time through the city’s “AfterZone” programs. Functioning like neighborhood campuses, the zones are anchored by a school, but they also offer art classes, sports, and academic enrichment outside of the regular school day and often outside of the regular school facility—at recreation centers, libraries, and youth centers. AfterZone also extends beyond the school year, with Summer Scholars, a four-week program focused on science, technology, engineering, and math that is jointly taught by staff from community organizations and teachers from Providence public schools.<sup>29</sup> Overseeing all of this, including the AfterZone staff, which includes AmeriCorps members, local college volunteers, and teachers, is PASA.

In New York City, The After School Corporation (TASC) manages a network of schools that are adding at least three extra hours a day. TASC sets ELT guidelines, but each of the 17 elementary and middle schools it works with partners with a different community organization, and each has teams that determine how best to add time. One of the TASC schools, Thurgood Marshall Academy in Harlem, was founded in the early 1990s by New Visions for Public Schools and the Harlem-based nonprofit Abyssinian Development Corporation. Now, Abyssinian provides community educators that, often with the help of teachers, provide an after-school science inquiry program to the academy’s lower school, as well as other small-group enrichment activities in the late afternoon.

Relying on outside partners to develop and staff extra learning requires a different management approach. It means sharing information, space, and even funding—continuing points of contention between school-based and out-of-school institutions. But the school and out-of-school partnerships are the reason why TASC’s ELT schools can offer their students three or more hours a day of learning. And partnerships have helped make Boston’s Edwards Middle School another one of Mass 2020’s success stories. At Edwards, the national nonprofit Citizen Schools provides on-site programming—academic support, college and career guidance, and apprenticeships—for three hours in the

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afternoon, Monday through Thursday. Staffed by a combination of AmeriCorps members, volunteers, and paid staff, Citizen Schools calls itself a “second shift” of educators and plans to expand even beyond the 18 cities it now serves.

Universities are another good source for second-shift educators. At the Stanford New School in Palo Alto, Calif., a charter school created and supervised by Stanford University’s School of Education, teachers will be paid more (under contract) to work Saturdays and after school, but the school knows that it will need more staff. To meet its ambitious SIG plans, which call for extending the school year (by four days in the first year and six in the second) and adding after-school and summer bridge programs, the school will hire additional teachers and bring in a collection of paid college assistants and tutors.

But not every place has access to plentiful partners and extra staff. In Montana’s rural Big Horn County, Pryor Middle School is one of a handful of SIG schools, or what the state calls its “Promise Schools.” Pryor’s plans for more time—up to 100 hours a year—were based primarily on offering after-school programs and lengthening its existing summer program. What may sound like a simple strategy for big cities like New York City or Boston, or university towns like Palo Alto, Calif., is doubtful in a place like Pryor, whose entire population barely hits 700. For Pryor to offer drama and science clubs after school, or to double the length of its summer program (to six–eight weeks), it must ask more of its dozen or so teachers, most of whom live an hour’s drive away in Billings. “Teachers are already stretched so it’s

taxing no matter how we do it,” says Mandy Smoker Broaddus, who directs Indian Education for the Montana Office of Public Instruction.<sup>30</sup> Pryor’s plans to expand learning time, then, can’t turn to outside partnerships. “Providers?” asks Smoker Broaddus. “Pryor doesn’t have any. Sylvan Learning Center is the closest thing, and it’s in Billings.”

## Changing the Way We Use Time

The third approach to extending learning time is to use existing time differently and, presumably, more efficiently. But as sensible as this approach may sound, its results often fall well short of the mark. Many schools are proposing to gain time for instruction by decreasing non-instructional time, namely lunch, recess, or the time allotted for students to move between classes. For example, Rio Vista Elementary School in California’s Mt. Diablo Unified School District, one of the roughly 100 SIG schools in the state, proposed to cut the transition time between classes from five minutes to three minutes. This change, the school claims, would add eight minutes a day for first- and second-graders and six minutes for the third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders. Ostensibly redeployed throughout the day for math or reading instruction, these few minutes add up to just one extra day of instruction per year. And no research on time and learning has ever found an effect from a single day of instruction.

Rio Vista also moved recess so that it now comes before lunch, a move that school officials say research backs as a way to save transition time. Research on the lunch-recess switch is indeed growing, but it focuses on nutrition and obesity, not time. A 2009 study in the *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management* found that students waste less and consume more nutritious food when recess is scheduled before lunch.<sup>31</sup> The reason is simple: the kids are hungrier after recess, and when they eat well, they behave better. These findings have little to do, however, with the potential time savings that some school officials are citing. Calabasas Elementary School in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District of California, for example, says that its new “Play First, Eat Second” schedule will generate 15 extra minutes of instructional time. The school also will eliminate an extra afternoon recess for grades one through

three, adding what the school says will be another 10 minutes of instruction for physical education, science, social studies or art.

If this all sounds like nickel and diming, it is. For the most part, these SIG schools are “extending learning time” without changing anything at all—an appealing option for schools charged with implementing so many reforms at once. The result will be much less appealing, since curbing lunch and recess, to cite just one popular example, won’t improve student or school outcomes. To the contrary, a recent review of 50 studies on school-based physical activity by the federal Centers for Disease Control found evidence that recess has a positive effect on academic achievement.<sup>32</sup> Further, rushed lunchtimes and shortened recesses often anger parents. Lauren Greve, a clinical psychologist in Providence, is outraged that the district has cut recess in an attempt to add instructional hours elsewhere. The mother of

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a first-grader whose school now allows 10 minutes of recess if kids hurry through lunch, Greve calls it “incomprehensible that 20 minutes of recess time cannot find its way into this ‘mission’ that purports to be about our children’s educations.”<sup>33</sup>

Schools that restructure rather than add time aren’t all trading minutes. Some acknowledge in their plans that more time is not analogous to better learning. Nebraska’s Minatare Elementary School, for example, states in its plans that “student engagement is more important than merely adding minutes to the day. It is the quality use of those minutes that matters.” That philosophy also seems to inform new strategies at The Construction Careers Center in St. Louis, Mo., the nation’s first charter school focused on the

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construction trades. The center wants to gradually add 200 hours to its school year. But first it is addressing factors that routinely prevent students from effectively using the time they already have: It is working on reducing the number of suspended students by improving discipline policies, decreasing the percentage of students who drop out by adding advisory periods and improving the transition from summer, and establishing an early warning system for students in need of intervention.

At some point, plans to use time differently are difficult to distinguish from simply adopting new strategies to improve education. Focusing on attendance and discipline, for example, may seem an unusual approach to extending learning time. But for the most vulnerable populations at low-performing schools, chronic absenteeism is a huge problem that leads to correspondingly big losses in learning time. Minatare Elementary, which knows the problem well, will have a counselor track attendance and contact students' homes whenever they are absent. Likewise, SIG schools in the San Francisco Unified School District plan to designate a staff member, in this case a parent liaison, to contact parents of children with spotty attendance. And the Chelsea Career and Technical Education High School in New York City is partnering with a nonprofit to call and even visit the homes of absentees. It seems a worthwhile effort: a recent report found that at least 20 percent of the city's fourth-graders in 300 schools were chronically absent, leading to lower achievement by both students and their schools.<sup>34</sup>

Many schools are also turning to technology to boost learning time. Some, like Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven, Conn., are assembling teams to examine how technology can give students more time. Others are jumping right in, even if they are not yet specific or particularly sophisticated about their

plans. Gentry High School in Mississippi, for example, is starting a 90-minute, computer-based literacy class for students with low scores in reading, while Gossler Park Elementary in New Hampshire plans to open "technology classrooms" after school. New York City's Long Island City High School promises online learning opportunities, and South Plains Academy in Texas will issue laptops to its students. Some are turning to outside organizations for help. Michigan's Buchanan High School is using Education 2020, a management system that helps districts provide virtual instruction, to provide remediation and ACT preparation during an extra hour supervised by a media specialist and a counselor for at-risk students.

More polished are the designs of a few charter school networks. They include California's Rocketship Education, which uses a hybrid model of traditional and computer-based learning with daily, 100-minute blocks of independent study. A network of charter high schools, Carpe Diem, adds even more flexibility: it offers not just online learning but year-round start dates and early graduation, all under the banner of its motto "The Power to Choose—Your Place (Online) or Our Place (On Campus)."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, a spinoff of New York's successful School of One (one of the first to customize instruction through technology) is the city's newest attempt to give every student a mix of modalities for learning. The spinoff, called New Classrooms, uses School of One software to assign each student a "playlist" of learning modules, including large- and small-group instruction, individual tutoring, and online learning.

It's not clear whether efforts like New Classrooms can improve the quality of learning for students in otherwise failing schools, or whether Rocketship and Carpe Diem can offer designs that are effective as well as efficient. What is clear is that technology is rapidly expanding as an educational tool and will surely expand options not just for extending time but for enhancing learning.

## The Future of ELT

The NCTL published a report last year describing what makes ELT schools work well. These schools, the report says, use time to address individual needs, to build a culture of high expectations, to continuously strengthen instruction and the use of data, to provide

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a well-rounded education, and to prepare students for college and career.<sup>36</sup> These desirable goals, the report acknowledges, are neither new nor unique to extending time. The point is that time is the device, the enabler, for these practices to take root and flourish.

There is evidence that ELT works. An analysis of data from the national School and Staffing Survey found that schools with longer-than-average schedules maintained a focus on both core academics and subjects like physical education and music.<sup>37</sup> Leaders of successful ELT schools say that more time has increased student “time on task,” broadened the curriculum, and allowed for more experiential learning, greater attention to individual students, and stronger adult-child relationships.<sup>38</sup> These ELT schools use time well to improve teacher effectiveness and student engagement. They recognize that good teaching requires time to plan, just as good learning requires more than seat time in a classroom. In these schools, community organizations provide more than just hit-or-miss help, technology means more than new laptops, and student engagement is not disconnected from teaching and learning. Teachers, in turn, are attracted to these schools because they see a strategy for great education that both depends on and supports them as professionals.

But these schools didn’t get this way by adding minutes or hours or even days. Good schools are made by strong networks that support and demand great leaders, who create and cultivate effective teams of teachers, who really know what and how to teach students. To suggest that our nation’s worst schools will be transformed, and that student outcomes will

improve, because of more time is not any different than suggesting that they will be transformed by more money. Both are necessary, and both boast plenty of persuasive adages about why more is better. But both are overly simplistic treatments to the very complex problem of improving education.

School leaders know this. “The bottom line,” says Ron Karsen, principal of Dayton Street School in Newark, N.J., “is that if I can guarantee quality instruction, then I won’t need the extended time ... We’ll be able to use the time we have to get the work done.”<sup>39</sup> Leaders like Karsen are grateful for SIG funding, but they know that transforming a school is not really about time. If it were, schools that have been operating for years with extended schedules would not be identified as low performers. There would be no SIG funding for San Francisco’s Everett Middle School, which extended its day by an hour six years ago. Nor would Akili Academy, an elementary charter school in the Recovery School District in New Orleans, which has had an eight-hour schedule since 2007, be receiving more than \$700,000 in SIG funding. Yet, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s website of resources, *Doing What Works*, increasing time is a “quick win” for turning around chronically low-performing schools.<sup>40</sup>

The nation’s hope, codified in federal school improvement strategy, is that its worst schools will get better by adding time. Yet, this ignores what we know about turnarounds and what we know about time. That many SIG schools are finding ways around adding time, either by leveraging summer and after-school programs or by tinkering with minutes from recess and lunch, signals measures that are at once creative and desperate.

More time for learning should be a priority for the nation, if closing achievement gaps really is a national goal. But the ELT movement must learn from itself. It must acknowledge that its strategies for success are not really first or mostly about time, lest extending time be just one of many reforms that is adopted and dropped as budgets allow.

## Notes

1. Rosalind Rossi, Arne Duncan: "CPS deserves 'a badge of shame' for short school day," *Chicago Sun Times*, September 8, 2011.
2. According to the U.S. Department of Education's 2011 *Condition of Education* report, about 68 percent of 12th-graders in high-poverty schools graduated with a diploma in 2008, compared with 91 percent of 12th-graders in low-poverty schools. See, *The Condition of Education* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, May 2011).
3. Two of the four models for federal School Improvement Grants, "transformation" and "turnaround," require extended learning time. Combined, these models constitute more than 80 percent of all SIG grantees.
4. *Prisoners of Time: Report of the U.S. National Education Commission on Time and Learning* (Washington, DC: 1994). The Education Council Act of 1991 established the National Education Commission on Time and Learning as a nine-member independent advisory body and called for a comprehensive review of the relationship between time and learning in U.S. schools.
5. Padmini Jambulapati, *A Portrait of School Improvement Grantees* (Washington, DC: Education Sector, April 2011). Also see May 2011 analysis of SIG grantees: S. Hurlburt, K.C. Le Floch, S.B. Therriault, and S. Cole, "Baseline Analyses of SIG Applications and SIG-Eligible and SIG Awarded Schools," (NCEE 2011–4019) National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
6. Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time initiative now includes 19 schools in nine districts, each having added at least 300 hours of time across the school year; more than three quarters of the 10,000+ students served are low-income.
7. Massachusetts was first in 1852, followed by New York in 1853. By 1913, all states had compulsory education laws.
8. Education Commission of the States, "Minimum Number of Instructional Hours," (Denver, CO: November 2007). The average minimum number of minutes in a high school day (ninth–12th) across the 50 states is 314 minutes, which is 12 minutes longer than the average minimum day for elementary grades (first–fifth) and four minutes longer than the average middle school grades (sixth–eighth).
9. Education Sector analysis of state time policies, including minimum time requirements and achievement based on 2011 NAEP eighth-grade reading and math scores and 2012 *Quality Counts* scores. (*Education Week's* annual report on state-level efforts to improve public education.)
10. Erika Patall, Harris Cooper, Ashley Batts Allen, "Extending the School Day or School Year: A Systematic Review of Research" (1985–2009), *Review of Educational Research* 80, no. 401 (2010).
11. In his FY13 budget, Massachusetts Gov. Patrick increased funding for the ELT Initiative by \$1 million. Boston Public Schools also recently received a federal Investing in Innovation grant in 2011 for \$2.9 million to work with the National Center on Time and Learning to replicate an ELT school turnaround strategy.
12. Padmini Jambulapati, *A Portrait of School Improvement Grantees*; S. Hurlburt, K.C. Le Floch, S.B. Therriault, and S. Cole, "Baseline Analyses of SIG Applications and SIG-Eligible and SIG Awarded Schools," (NCEE 2011–4019).
13. *Learning Time in America: Trends to Reform the American School Calendar* (National Center on Time and Learning and Education Commission of the States, Summer 2011). Note that SIG funding is Title 1 plus federal stimulus funds.
14. Under No Child Left Behind, schools that do not make adequate yearly progress are required to offer children in low-income families the opportunity to receive SES.
15. A subsequent House bill, the Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act (HR 3990), consolidates 21CCLC into a large block grant for a variety of in-school and out-of-school programs.
16. The 2009 Guidelines for SIG under 1003(g) ESEA Act of 1965. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. "Other" includes physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations.
17. S. Hurlburt, K.C. Le Floch, S.B. Therriault, and S. Cole. "Baseline Analyses of SIG Applications and SIG-Eligible and SIG Awarded Schools," (NCEE 2011–4019).
18. Sarah Almy and Christina Theokas, *Prepared for Class: High Poverty Schools Continue to Have Fewer In-Field Teachers* (Washington, DC: Education Trust, November 2010).
19. Richard Ingersoll and David Perda, *How High Is Teacher Turnover and Is It a Problem?* (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, 2011) Nationally, 15 percent of new teachers leave teaching within the first year; 30 percent within three years; and 50 percent within five years. In urban schools, approximately 50 percent leave within three years.
20. Education Sector analysis of NCTL database (2011) and a sample of 190 Local Education Agency SIG applications from 48 states (not including MD, RI, and DC). The depth and breadth of the SIG applications vary by state and differ between large and small districts. Some applications include detailed descriptions of plans and capacity for implementation, as well as budget considerations and a three-year timeline. Others include little to no details.
21. Of the sample of 190 SIG applications, 14 were too vague or unclear to categorize. Of the rest, 15 percent proposed adding time to the formal school schedule, 64 percent proposed expanded learning outside of the school, and 21 percent proposed to restructure or use time differently. More than a quarter of these proposed a combination of expanded learning and either adding time or using time differently.

22. Adriana Janovich, "Schools using improvement grants to raise the educational bar," *Yakima Herald-Republic*, September 4, 2011. <http://www.yakima-herald.com/stories/2011/09/04/schools-using-improvement-grants-to-raise-the-educational-bar>
23. The Kuss story is profiled by Mass 2020 in "Kuss Middle School: Expanding Time to Accelerate School Improvement," available online at <http://www.mass2020.org/files/file/Kuss%20Case%20Study.pdf>
24. Survey data show that teachers increasingly approve of financial incentives, but research has not found any particular incentive model to be consistently effective as a recruitment tool, and even less so for retention. See for example, Eric Hanushek, John Kain, and Steven Rivkin, "Why Public Schools Lose Teachers," NBER Working Paper 8599 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2001); and Dan Goldhaber, et al., "Teacher attitudes about compensation reform: Implications for reform implementation," School Finance Redesign Project, Working Paper 20 (Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, 2007).
25. In November, the district agreed to increase teacher pay for the extended schedule at participating schools. CPS has plans to extend the day districtwide by 36 minutes beginning in the fall of 2012. "CPS Full School Day High School Guidelines Outline Plan to Provide Students with More Instructional Time," Chicago Public Schools Press Release, December 22, 2011, available online at [http://www.cps.edu/News/Press\\_releases/Pages/12\\_22\\_2011\\_PR1.aspx](http://www.cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/12_22_2011_PR1.aspx)
26. Joy Resmovits, "Apollo 20 Initial Results Show Rising Math Scores But Questions Remain," *Huffington Post*, Oct 12, 2011, available online at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/12/apollo-20-houston-initial-results\\_n\\_1007262.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/12/apollo-20-houston-initial-results_n_1007262.html)
27. SIG schools can be granted autonomy as a way to spur change although usually the leadership for this is provided by an outside education management group.
28. As part of school improvement, school districts can partner with parent organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, health clinics, and other state or local agencies, and can contract out services to one or multiple "external providers" to meet SIG requirements, including extended time.
29. AfterZone is funded by a combination of SIG, 21CCLC, AmeriCorps, and Title I funds at an average cost of \$240,000 a year per school.
30. Mandy Smoker Broaddus, in discussion with author, March 2012.
31. Alice Jo Rainville, Kristi Lofton, and Deborah Carr, "Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools: Development of a Best Practice Checklist," *Journal of Child Nutrition and Management* Volume 33, Issue 2 (Fall 2009).
32. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance* (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), available online at [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/pdf/pa-pe\\_paper.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf)
33. Lauren Greve, "Depriving Our Children of Healthy Play," *Providence Journal*, November 11, 2011, available online at <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODE/ProJo/LandingPage/LandingPage.aspx?href=VFBKLzlwMTEvMTvEvMDQ.&pageno=MTg.&entity=QXlwMTgwMw..&view=ZW50aXR5>
34. *Taking Attendance Seriously: How Student Absences Undermine Student and School Performance in New York City* (New York: Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2011).
35. <http://www.educationalleadership-digital.com/educationalleadership/20111112?pg=30#pg30>
36. *Time Well Spent: Eight Powerful Practices of Successful, Expanded-Time Schools* (Boston, MA: National Center on Time and Learning, 2011).
37. Tammy Kolbe, Mark Partridge, and Fran O'Reilly, *Time and Learning in Schools: A National Profile* (Boston, MA: National Center on Time and Learning, 2011).
38. In Chicago, for example, principals from 13 of the schools that added 90 extra minutes in 2011 wrote an op-ed arguing that the longer school day has meant more time for core subjects, more opportunities for enrichment, and recess for the elementary schools. "13 Principals Say City's Longer School Day Works," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 17, 2012.
39. "Extending Learning Time for Student Success: An Interview with Ron Karsen, Principal of Dayton Street School in Newark, NJ," U.S. Department of Education website.
40. "Doing What Works," U.S. Department of Education website, available online at [http://dww.ed.gov/School-Turnaround/Quick-Wins/see/index.cfm?T\\_ID=21&P\\_ID=46&c1=678#cluster-1](http://dww.ed.gov/School-Turnaround/Quick-Wins/see/index.cfm?T_ID=21&P_ID=46&c1=678#cluster-1)