

TRACKING AN EMERGING MOVEMENT:

A Report on Expanded-Time Schools in America

By David A. Farbman

From the National Center on Time & Learning

FIFTEEN years ago, the National Education Commission on Time and Learning explained that the American school calendar of 180 six-hour days stands as the “design flaw” of our education system, for schools could not be expected to enable children to achieve high standards within the confines of the antiquated schedule.

Today, a small but growing number of schools have begun operating with school days substantially longer than the six-hour norm and, in many cases, a calendar that exceeds the standard 180 days.

The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL), with the support of the William and Flora Hewlett

Foundation, has produced this report on the state of “expanded-time (ET) schools.” Through this effort, NCTL has helped to define and bring together this category of schools, while still recognizing the considerable diversity among this group.

Extracting and analyzing information from NCTL’s database of 655 schools, this report describes trends emerging among these schools, including issues related to costs, time use, and student outcomes. The searchable database is available at www.timeandlearning.org.

Though findings cannot be considered conclusive—the field of expanded-time schools is too

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new and decentralized to be confident that the database is fully representative—they do highlight the relatively widespread use and potential benefits of expanded time. Over the coming years, because new federal funding

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supports an agenda of expanded time, NCTL expects researchers, educators, and policy makers to focus more intently on expanded-time schools and the promise they may hold for raising student achievement.

Characteristics of Expanded-Time Schools

Time—While the range of time added is quite broad for ET schools, on average, the schools in the database offer about 25% more time than the national norm. It is more typical for ET schools to extend the length of the day than to add days to the school year.

Number of students and location of schools—Based on available enrollment data, the 655 schools in the database serve approximately 300,000 students in 36 states and

the District of Columbia, with most schools located in large cities.

Student population served—When compared with national averages, ET schools serve a much more heavily minority and poorer student population. African-American students represent 45% of the total, with Hispanic and white students each representing about one-quarter of the student population. Two-thirds of the school children served in these schools (66%) are poor.

Type of schools—ET schools serve a broad range of students at all grade levels, with grades served skewed toward younger grades, even as a substantial number of schools serve high school grades. Charter schools constitute almost three-quarters (74%) of the schools. They are more likely to have longer years than district schools, but not necessarily longer days.

Age of ET schools—Among respondent database schools, almost half (47%) have begun in the last three years. A majority of “converted schools” (80%) have expanded their day and/or year in the last three years, while only 36% of “startup schools” emerged in the last three years. Thus, growth is being fed primarily by existing schools that convert to a longer day and/or year.

Staffing costs of ET schools—Of the converted schools, 75% pay

their teachers more, while only 44% of startup schools do. Among those schools that pay their teachers more for the additional time worked, schools reported a mean 13.6% increase in pay.

Trends in Teacher and Student Time

Student time—Elementary and middle-grade students spend over 1,500 minutes per week in core academic classes, equivalent to five hours per day. Elementary

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students spend roughly double the amount of time in English language arts (ELA) as they do in math. While middle-grade students spend time more evenly across the four core academic subjects. High school students spend less time in core academics (about 1,175 minutes per week) than their younger peers, with the amount of enrichment time for high school students (430 minutes per week) exceeding by 90 minutes (or more) time spent in any one academic subject.

Teacher time—Teachers at different grade levels spend their time differently, with elementary teachers spending 73% of their

time teaching and middle and high school teachers spending proportionally less time teaching (63%). Middle and high school teachers spend more time in common planning and other activities than do elementary teachers.

Time and Student Achievement

Perceptions of the value of expanded time—A vast majority of schools (90%) rank expanded time as very important to meeting their educational goals (either a “4” or “5” on an ascending five-point scale).

Relationship Between Time and Performance

A correlational analysis found a statistically significant ($p < .01$) moderate association between the number of minutes per day and student performance for grades 7 and 10 in both math ($r = .29$ and $r = .41$, respectively) and ELA ($r = .31$ and $r = .43$, respectively). An analysis of variance on the most robust data set available (7th grade) identified significant differences ($p < .05$) in both math and ELA performance, with students in schools with longer days outperforming students in schools with shorter days.

Although the data available for these analyses were limited, they do suggest a positive relationship between student performance and daily time. ■

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