



Expanded learning, expansive teacher leadership

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Done well, providing more time for students to learn can be a lever for forcing schools to rethink how teachers teach and how they lead.

Expanded learning time (ELT) has emerged as a useful way to rethink how schools are organized and funded. That includes reconsidering who teaches and how they go about their work.

ELT proponents hope educators can harness additional time to drive student achievement while doing more to inspire and engage students. They hold out the promise of doing so both in and out of school buildings and beyond the traditional school day. A recent research report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation suggests that extended learning can make a difference for student achievement but only if done thoughtfully and well (Redd et al., 2012).

In this way, expanded learning time is no different than any number of hyped innovations that showed promise in pilot sites only to disappoint at scale. Schools cannot deliver on the promise of expanded learning, much less transform American schools, without revisiting familiar governance arrangements, management practices, teacher job descriptions, and licensure requirements.

Expanded learning time offers an opportunity to change outdated and inefficient policies, school organizations, and teaching roles. It does so by offering more time in the school day to think creatively about teaching and learning. Also, because parts of the ELT model reside outside the traditional school day, they make it easier to sidestep familiar contractual provisions, rules, and laws about who can teach, how classes should be organized, and how schools need to operate. Of course, such efforts ought to start by making sure that the traditional school day is being wisely used.

The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) estimates that 1,000 schools have begun to rethink how they use time. Done wisely, this can allow teachers to cover more content, individualize instruction, offer deeper learning (e.g., enrichment courses ranging from robotics and astronomy to drama and creative writing), and build more engaged partnerships with community-based organizations, local businesses, colleges, and cultural institutions. While we do not know how many of these schools are serious about their efforts, such ventures represent a useful first step toward revamping anachronistic school schedules and calendars.

NCTL has seen some commonalities in successful extended learning schools. They “make every minute count,” individualize learning, use data on student learning extensively, and build school cultures of high expectations and mutual accountability (Kaplan & Chan, 2012). In other words, there’s no magic. Good schools strive to do the same things today, just as the “effective schools research” found good schools were doing in the 1970s. The trick is less about knowing what good schools do and more about figuring out how other schools can do those things intensively — and well.

As one of the authors notes in the just-published *Cage-Busting Leadership* (Harvard Education Press, 2013), “Even the most heralded charter and district schools tend to rely on ‘more, better’ solutions: more school time, more talent, and staff working more evenings and weekends. The problem is that the supply of talent, energy, and passion is limited. That’s why transformative improvement, in any sector, typically requires rethinking the way things are done” (Hess, 2013).

As noted in the forthcoming book, *Teacherpreneurs* (Jossey-Bass, 2013), “The challenges facing our public schools cannot be met with every teacher serving in the same narrow roles designed for a bygone era,” and there are many classroom experts who are more than ready to be “producers of solutions rather than just implementers of someone else’s” (Berry, Byrd, & Wieder, 2013).

When it comes to school reform, though, we typically make one of two mistakes. First, we imagine that policy can force dramatic educational changes. In the case of expanded learning time, proponents may haphazardly envision a longer day or year as a simple recipe for much-needed school “turnarounds.” They presume that adding more instruction, even when it turns out to be mediocre or uninspired, will be enough to make a big difference for students. The second mistake is to believe that educators, of their own accord, will be able to make dramatic changes in practice and pedagogy absent broader changes in policy. Too often, those who make this mistake merrily pursue their desired reforms without pursuing requisite structural change, imagining that buy-in and big new investments in professional development will overcome any and all hurdles. Neither approach is likely to fulfill the promise of extended learning, which requires new structural realities as well as the incentives and supports that can help motivate and sustain improvement efforts.

Expanded learning can create the structural space to serve kids better and rethink delivery, but taking advantage of those opportunities requires that we do more than ask teachers and schools to do more of the same. Unfortunately, such a tack is all too common and likely to yield only minimal improvement. We believe there may be grounds for optimism here. Expanded learning advocates include such remarkable bedfellows as union leaders Randi Weingarten and Dennis Van Roekel, progressive scholar Linda Darling-Hammond, and no-excuses reformer Jon Schnur (Ford Foundation, 2012). Expanded learning can transcend the usual debates and break down two commonly held (and false) assumptions: that unions can embrace meaningful improvement without revisiting anachronistic work rules and that no-excuses reformers can close achievement gaps or drive dramatic improvement without overhauling the familiar schoolhouse.

Expanded learning should serve as a mechanism for doing two key things: providing more time for students to learn and helping create the conditions that allow teachers to work effectively. For expanded learning time to deliver on its promise, however, we must rethink the role of teachers and what they can and must do as leaders. For students to reap the full advantage of extended (school day or summer) learning opportunities, teachers must know and understand families and communities more deeply; they also must work more effectively with a variety of local partners and providers and help lead, with their principals, new ways of organizing time and teaching.

Expanded learning time could use fully licensed teachers and nontraditional educators in smart ways. Extended-day models can provide crucial room to pioneer uses of nontraditional staff and nontraditional classrooms that would otherwise be prohibited by state policy or collective bargaining agreements. New models can employ alternative class size configurations, capitalize on new technologies and online learning, and make full use of part-time educators (such as Citizen Schools second-shifters) — while also creating opportunities for teachers to take on ambitious and powerful leadership roles that may not fit in a traditional school day or contract.

We are heartened by how the Massachusetts Expanding Learning Time Initiative has connected growing numbers of schools to the inventive work of nonprofits like Tenacity, PlayWorks, and CitySprouts. These organizations offer students a range of ways to link academic learning to fitness, conflict resolution, and community agriculture and nutrition. But to cultivate, support, and fully use such collaborations requires teachers to alter their familiar roles.

Expanded learning time may enable teachers to create new structures and tools to work together as professionals, escaping the isolation that has beset “Extended learning models that operate outside the school day make it easier to sidestep familiar contractual provisions, rules, and laws about who can teach, how classes should be organized, and how schools need to operate.” “Schools can’t deliver on the promise of extended learning without revisiting familiar governance arrangements, management practices, teacher job descriptions, and licensure requirements.” the profession since its mid-19th-century origins. But a bold new brand of teacher leaders for extended learning opportunities won’t simply appear. Expanded learning time creates an opportunity for change and a need for leadership, but educators, would-be reformers, and policy makers must help cultivate the teacher leadership needed for such opportunities and commit to creating policies that establish and sustain it. Doing so requires creating room for teachers to think and lead, and this requires moving beyond outdated school models.

Toward dynamic models: Teacher leadership for ELT

A bold brand of teacher leadership begins with finding ways to prepare and identify teachers who can work effectively with community-based organizations or online, and not just those best suited to the conventional classroom. We’re agnostic whether teachers excel at these roles in combination or whether we’re best served by thinking about these as distinct roles played by different individuals.

Hoary parent conferences need to be augmented by relationship building with local stakeholders from inside and outside education — thus redefining and expanding the role of the teacher as classroom leader. Learning support ought to incorporate online tutoring or virtual mentoring and not just the teacher and student huddling for a few extra minutes at the end of class. Not all teachers can or should tackle these new responsibilities or will be able to do them equally well, which is why policy makers, system leaders, and union officials would do well to think much more deeply about differentiated roles and pay.

To fulfill its promise, expanded learning time will require teacher leaders with the practical knowledge to implement new school designs and translate this knowledge for union and district leaders. As Berry and others wrote in *Teaching 2030* (Teachers College Press, 2011), we need teacher leaders — specifically teacherpreneurs — who have deep pedagogical skills to continue teaching. They also should have the time and reward, not solely for individual pecuniary gain, but to share their expertise with colleagues and work with specialists who can support students in 24/7 personalized learning opportunities. In doing so, teacherpreneurs can leverage the expertise of all teachers and “blur the lines of distinction between those who teach and those who lead” (Berry, 2011).

To take full advantage of the new opportunities presented by ELT and to work effectively with the new tools and partners that they will require, we need creative, dynamic, forward-looking classroom experts to lead the way.

For example, teacherpreneurs can play powerful roles in creating and sustaining new partnerships, including those with Boys & Girls Clubs and other youth development programs. They also can push both education schools and alternative certification programs to rethink what it means to prepare new teachers and develop more experienced ones — in real time, beyond the constraints of outmoded scheduling for credit offerings of universities and other traditional professional development providers. Teacherpreneurs can capitalize on new technologies such as online tutoring, edugames, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), freeing up time for all teachers to lead in new ways, including brokering instructional services and orchestrating personalized learning plans for students in and out of cyberspace.

Technology can free the teacher from having to shepherd 25 to 35 students through a prescribed curriculum from start to finish. Twenty-first-century teaching can unshackle us from our ingrained disputes, obsolete arrangements, and inept anxieties. Teaching for 21st-century learning is too complicated for one teacher to do it all — and demands a larger array of experts, specialists, and generalists working as a team. The United States has 7 million medical professionals, but only 700,000 physicians — who practice in 130 different specialties (American Board of Medical Specialties, 2012). These doctors are supported by many talented professionals, such as nurses, physical therapists, and biomedical engineers. We imagine expert generalists working with online experts to teach fractions, or consulting teachers in quantum physics who also have appointments in universities or research labs. We can begin to rethink teaching in much the same way — and expanded learning time can help us begin to do so, but only with a new policy framework.

Creating the policy framework

Talking about health care reform, the conservative commentator and former George W. Bush aide Peter Wehner noted that “big policy changes don’t come along very often,” primarily because Americans are “fairly nonideological and pragmatic” and “tend to play within the 40-yard lines” (Stevenson, 2009). But, if we are talking about the prospect for big policy changes, then we must accomplish at least the following tasks.

#1. Reengineer the teacher’s role.

Teachers of various stripes will need much more room to move in and out of different roles, take on more or less responsibility, focus on more or fewer students, and serve in and out of cyberspace, as well as in and out of their school buildings. We envision a career lattice, rather than a career ladder. Rather than reifying steeply sloped traditional hierarchies, making fuller use of teacher talent will require work models that combine the skills of generalists and specialists, of seasoned staff and part-time volunteers, in smarter and more flexible ways. Teacher education must extend beyond familiar university-based, alternative certification, and urban residency approaches — none of which have much to say about how to rethink teachers in hybrid roles or cultivate bold forms of teacher leadership for tomorrow’s schools. And teacher pay will have to reflect both the new classroom roles experts must play and the performances that drive improvements in professional learning and student achievement.

#2. Rethink K–12, higher education, and community-based organization resources.

Today’s K–12 finance system is decoupled from the higher education system that recruits and prepares teachers. And both K–12 and higher education services are disconnected from the social and health care services that provide vital services to students and families. Expanded learning time — and teacher leadership — would benefit significantly from fusing the resources that currently remain isolated within K–12, higher education, and community-based organizations. Fused resources will be essential to making deeper investments in students, but also will better equip teacher leaders to both teach and lead.

#3. Reallocate resources to fuel innovation.

Many schools suffer from inequities in how certain students and communities are funded. And the economic recession has left many districts feeling strapped. But now is the time for policy makers, administrators, and union leaders to think much differently about how to use dollars. They would do well to explore how high-quality new providers can help deliver the kinds of learning experiences, support, and online opportunities

that take full advantage of extended learning time — and in doing so, create new space for teachers to lead and innovate.

#4. Reframe accountability to focus on the spread of teaching expertise.

Our current accountability system, framed by No Child Left Behind, rests on archaic rules, regulations, systems, and structures that impede teachers and administrators' efforts to extend better student learning. America's system of testing ought to take care to see that students can apply what they know to new problems and situations. The testing system must send clear signals about why students are or are not succeeding and supply transparent indicators so teachers know what they need to do, singly or collaboratively, to help students learn. Finally, the system must allow teachers to improve and spread their expertise to help one another — and become paragons of professionalism.

Too often, school reform is viewed in divisive and dysfunctional ways. But expanded learning time has supporters in what are usually seen as warring camps. It allows us to move beyond the debates and, in spite of the difficulties, create and sustain the kinds of partnerships that are already working. Transformational expanded learning time models will entail teachers playing different niche leadership roles than they do now, and policy makers, administrators, and union leaders will have to embrace policies and rules that make this possible. This will inevitably entail breaking up rigid teacher certification regimes, lock-step salary schedules, and the widgetized culture of classroom teaching. But doing so holds out the exciting promise of professionalization and a results-oriented teaching profession — one that transcends more than a century of school reforms geared to the exigencies of yesterday, in order to envision a new world of teaching and schooling designed for the opportunities of tomorrow.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/expanded-learning-expansive-teacher-leadership/>