

COMMENTARY

Expanded Learning Time as an Avenue to ChangeBy **Barnett Berry & Frederick M. Hess**

Twenty-first century teaching and learning pose stark challenges, as we seek both to educate all of our children and to do so to a level of unprecedented rigor. Meeting our audacious goals will require overhauling our outmoded system of public education. Whatever the merits of today's familiar classrooms, schools, and systems, the feeble progress born of 40 years of varied reforms suggests that current arrangements are manifestly unsuited to the challenges ahead. The path forward requires rethinking everything about how schools are organized and funded, including who teaches and how they go about their work. Happily, this offers the opportunity to transcend some hackneyed and divisive debates, and to consider a fresh take on how we use talent, time, tools, and resources to best serve kids.

Expanded learning time (often referred to as ELT) is one useful mechanism for such rethinking. Proponents of ELT hope that educators can tap the additional time needed to help drive student achievement while doing far more to inspire and engage students. They hold out the promise of doing so both within and outside brick-and-mortar school buildings and beyond the traditional 8:00 a.m.-to-2:30 p.m. school day. A recent research report, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, **suggests that ELT can make a difference for student achievement**, but only if done thoughtfully and well.

In this way, ELT is no different from any number of hyped innovations, which showed promise in pilot sites only to disappoint at scale. More lasting impact will demand a more profound effort. We contend that one cannot deliver on the promise of ELT, much less transform American schools, without revisiting familiar governance arrangements, management practices, teacher job descriptions, and licensure requirements.

As one of us (Hess) writes in the soon-to-be-published book *Cage-Busting Leadership*: "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." On the other hand, one of us (Berry) writes in his upcoming book, *Teacherpreneurs*, that there is plenty of teaching talent that has not yet been utilized.

Happily, ELT offers a window of opportunity to break the bonds of antiquated policies, calcified school organizations, and time-honored yet artless teaching roles. Why? Two reasons: These expanded-learning models offer more time in the school day to think creatively about teaching and learning, and the aspects of ELT that reside outside the traditional school day offer easier opportunities to sidestep familiar contractual provisions, rules, and laws about who can teach, how classes should be organized, and how schools need to operate.

Peter Wehner, a conservative commentator and former George W. Bush aide, noted in a **2009 *New York Times* article** that "big policy changes don't come along very often" in the United States, because Americans are "nonideological and pragmatic" and "tend to play within the 40-yard lines." But we are talking about the prospects of big policy change here, including at least four key elements to acting on this promise:

- **Re-engineer the role of teacher.** 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 more than a "ladder." Rather than reifying steeply sloped hierarchies, making fuller use of teacher talent will require work models that combine the skills of generalists and specialists, of technology and tutors, of seasoned staff and volunteers, in smarter and more flexible ways. Teacher education must extend beyond the familiar university-based, alternative certification, and urban-residency approaches—none of which has much to say about how to rethink teacher roles or cultivate bold forms of teacher leadership. And teacher pay will have to reflect both the new classroom roles experts must play and the performance that drives improvements in professional learning and student achievement.
- **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 precollegiate 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




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benefit mightily from fusing the resources that currently remain siloed within K-12, higher education, and community-based organizations. Fused resources will not only be essential to making deeper investments in students, but will also better equip teacher-leaders to both teach and lead.

• **Reallocate resources to fuel innovation.** Many schools, no doubt, 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 policymakers, administrators, and union leaders to think much differently about how dollars are used. 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 ELT—and, in doing so, create new space for teachers to lead and innovate.

• **Reframe accountability to focus on the spread of teaching expertise.** Our current accountability system, framed by the No Child Left Behind Act, rests on top of an archaic set of rules and regulations, systems, and structures, that impede teachers and administrators' best 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, and its accountability regimes must identify more than who is doing well or not. The accountability system must send clear signals as to 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.

School reform is too often viewed in dichotomous and dysfunctional ways. Expanded learning time—which has supporters in what are usually seen as warring camps—opens up windows of opportunity to move beyond the debates and create and sustain the kinds of partnerships that already are working, but are so incredibly difficult to do well and sustain. Transformational ELT models will entail teachers' playing roles different from those they do now, and policymakers, administrators, and union leaders will have to embrace policies and rules that make this possible. This will inevitably mean breaking up rigid teacher-certification regimes, lock-step salary schedules, and the "widgetized" culture of classroom teaching. But doing so holds out the thrilling promise of professionalization and a results-oriented teaching profession that transcends more than a century of school reform compromises geared to the demands of yesterday.

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