



Expanded Time, Enriching Experiences

Expanded Learning Time Schools and
Community Organization Partnerships

Kathleen Traphagen and Christine Johnson-Staub February 2010

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

Expanded learning time, or ELT, is gaining traction among educators and policymakers as a potent school improvement strategy. Over the past several years many high-performing charter schools and charter school networks across the country have used their autonomy to create longer school days and years for the express purpose of improving student outcomes.

These schools consider more learning time to be a fundamental ingredient of their success, particularly with low-income, high-risk students.¹ Standard public schools have been slower to implement ELT, but a database released by the National Center on Time & Learning in December 2009 shows that ELT is gaining momentum among these schools as well. More than one-quarter of the 655 expanded-time schools in 36 states included in the database are standard district public schools.²

Many schools seeking to maximize student success partner with external organizations that offer a variety of resources to students and teachers. Schools partner with community-based organizations, youth development agencies, health care and human service agencies, institutions of higher education, and cultural and arts institutions to deepen academic content, offer enrichments, train teachers, and ensure access to health, social, and other services for students and families.

ELT offers an opportunity for schools and external organizations to create strategic relationships that reach a new level of intensity and have a deep, substantive impact on students and teachers within the expanded school day. Managing and sustaining these partnerships, however, are complex and challenging tasks, as we learned from the five ELT school-community partnerships we examined for this report.

We chose to study four standard district public schools in Massachusetts and one public charter school in New Jersey. We focused on Massachusetts because it is the only state where ELT is a statewide, publicly funded initiative. The Massachusetts ELT initiative is administered by the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or ESE, and supported by a unique public-private partnership with the nonprofit intermediary Massachusetts 2020. We were interested in examining how the policy context and technical assistance infrastructure in Massachusetts has influenced the development and evolution of ELT school-community partnerships. We also looked at the LEAP University Charter School in Camden, New Jersey because of its commitment to an expanded time schedule and comprehensive student support services within the context of its strong partnership with Rutgers University.

Key findings

Structure and scope of ELT school-community partnerships

Several ELT schools and their partners are pushing the envelope beyond what either side had imagined the role of an external organization in the life of a school could be. Among the roles we found partners playing in ELT schools:

- Providing instruction in academic and enrichment content to students
- Providing professional development for teachers
- Providing mental and physical health services to students
- Engaging in parent outreach and involvement
- Playing a key role in the governance, funding, policy development, and pedagogical practice of the school

In short, ELT has enabled many schools and their partners to collaborate more intensively and more strategically than they did when the schools were operating on a traditional school schedule.

Beyond providing the essential ingredient of more time, ELT has catalyzed schools to redesign their approach by developing a school-wide academic focus in response to student data. ELT schools are taking advantage of the additional time they now have to plan and implement new instructional strategies to better align core academics, enrichment, support services, and family engagement strategies closely to their instructional focus.

Many are also initiating and expanding partnerships with external organizations to enhance programming and services aligned to their instructional focus. As partner staff and schoolteachers work together to ensure that core academics and partner-led programs and services are aligned, they are engaged in side-by-side teaching and learning that represents a more intense level of collaboration than most traditional school-community partnerships.

Features of successful ELT school-community partnerships

We have synthesized findings from our research, interviews, and on-site observations to offer a set of features present in many successful ELT school-community partnerships. Our findings suggest that the most successful partnerships:

- **Bring new knowledge and approaches to the school day.** Partners are bringing deep content knowledge to the school and benefitting students and teachers in ways that would be impossible for the school to replicate on its own.

- **Influence multiple stakeholders.** Some partners are teaching students, engaging families, and providing professional development to teachers, resulting in a truly integrated presence and multidimensional impact throughout the school.
- **Display flexibility on both sides.** Successful partnerships require both schools and partners to change many ways they traditionally operate, with partners adapting to the school's policies and procedures and schools reaching a comfort level with the different pedagogical approaches practiced by partner staff.
- **Are supported by a management infrastructure.** Partnerships require extensive planning, assessment, and revision. They are most successful when supported by effective staffing and leadership at both the school and the partner organization.

Common challenges

We found ELT practitioners and policymakers contending with several common obstacles to building and supporting effective partnerships, including:

- **Financing and sustainability.** The lack of sustainable and adequate funding limits the scope of programming within many partnerships and dissuades schools and partners from planning for the long term.
- **Defining outcomes to measure success.** Rarely have schools and their partners developed reliable, quantitative measurements to fully understand the impact of the partnership on student success.
- **Successfully aligning partner programs and services with the school's instructional focus.** Many schools and partners are at the beginning stages of aligning their work, while resource constraints often prevent deeper collaborative work.

Our recommendations below are designed to help schools and partners overcome these common challenges and build on the successes we found as we examined a set of five ELT school-community partnerships for this report.

Recommendations

We complete this report just as recent policy developments have the potential to catalyze ELT across the country. Increased learning time is a required component of both the school turnaround and transformation models in the Race to the Top Fund and School

Improvement Grants programs under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and has a federal definition nearly identical to that of ELT in Massachusetts.

Similarly, the Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act, or TIME Act, which is modeled after the Massachusetts ELT initiative and currently being considered before the House and Senate, would provide federal funding to launch initiatives to expand learning time in high-poverty schools. We hope these recommendations offer useful insights for policymakers, school leaders, districts, and community organizations exploring the role of partnerships in expanded learning time in this dynamic policy environment.

Key recommendations for ELT schools and districts considering new/expanded partnerships

- **Schools should involve partners early in the planning process**, share knowledge and data, and be open to considering new perspectives on how to ensure student success. Schools and partners should define the successful outcomes of the partnership early in the process and assess progress often to enable continuous improvement.
- **Schools should use a data-driven process to select partners that can enhance and deepen their instructional focus and/or meet students' nonacademic needs.** Partners with expertise in project-based learning, community engagement, youth leadership and voice, and other approaches honed in the out-of-school time environment have particularly good potential to ensure the expanded school day addresses the comprehensive needs of children and youth.
- **Partners must have the capacity to include *all* children and youth.** This is especially true for ensuring equity for students with physical, development, and learning disabilities, as well as for students who are English language learners.
- **Schools should designate partnership management to an ELT coordinator**, and ensure the coordinator is on the school's leadership team. Ongoing communication, clear expectations, and sustained support help partners adapt successfully to the cultural norms, policies, and procedures of the school.
- **Partner staff should be invited to participate alongside teachers in school-based professional development** as a powerful strategy for building partners' capacity and creating strong relationships among partner staff and teachers.
- **Schools should play a lead role in ensuring adequate funding and in-kind resources** for the partnership.

Key recommendations for organizations considering partnering with an ELT school

- **External organizations should recognize the significant potential benefits to partnering with an ELT school.** Perhaps the most direct benefit is access to young people. ELT eliminates recruitment, attendance, and retention challenges for out-of-school time providers in particular. For cultural institutions, partnering with an ELT school ensures deeper and more substantive engagement with young people—and often their families—than possible through occasional field trips or limited school visits. Universities have found partnering with ELT schools a tangible way to fulfill their community involvement goals. Other benefits to engaging in a partnership with an ELT school include access to student academic data that can inform program design, participation in professional development for partner staff, and new avenues to reach and involve families.
- **Potential partners should consider their ability and willingness to adapt to the cultural norms of the school.** ELT schools often require their external partners to adjust their programs and services—it rarely works to insert an existing program into an expanded time school day.
- **ELT partners must be prepared to serve all children,** not just those who affirmatively choose to participate in the program.
- **Potential partners should fully understand the costs and assess their capacity to financially support their own work.** Financing and sustainability challenge many partnerships. Current ELT partners caution that schools should not be viewed as a funding source because partners inevitably contribute more than they receive.
- **Potential partners should work jointly with ELT schools to quantify how they will measure the effects of all the services they provide.** For example, if a partner provides enrichment content to students and engages in family outreach that results in increased parent involvement in the school, it is important to assess the impact on parent involvement as well as quantify student enrichment outcomes.
- Among other important considerations for potential partners: **does the school have the leadership, resources, willingness, staff capacity, and time** to jointly focus on the partnership?

Key recommendations for policymakers designing ELT partnership initiatives

- **It is critical to ensure that the goal is not just more time, but more time used effectively** to meet children’s comprehensive needs. For example, the Massachusetts initiative includes three key components: increased time for core academics, broader

opportunities for student enrichment, and more time for teacher professional development and collaboration.

- **Policyholders should develop explicit strategies for ensuring that ELT partnerships are funded adequately and sustainably**, considering the potential role of schools, districts, states, and a variety of aligned federal funding streams to support partnerships over the long term. The Massachusetts ELT model encourages but does not require districts to participate in or fund partnerships. This approach has spawned dozens of creative partnerships, but many are struggling to sustain their efforts as the level of ELT funding per student remains stagnant and increasingly supports only teacher salaries.
- **Policyholders should ensure that technical assistance focused on ELT implementation includes external partners** as well as school and district leadership to build a strong foundation for school redesign.
- **Policyholders should consider the importance of intermediary organizations** to the successful implementation of ELT initiatives in multiple districts and schools. In particular, partnerships need more opportunities for disseminating promising practices and learning from each other, a role that intermediaries are well positioned to play.
- **Policyholders should also consider and plan for the impact of expanded learning time on community-based organizations**, particularly out-of-school time programs that serve children in a school considering lengthening its school day. There are transportation, financial, programmatic, and staff impacts that responsive policy development can significantly mitigate. Creatively solving these issues can ensure that community-based, out-of-school time providers have the capacity to engage in productive ELT school-community partnerships.
- **Policyholders and ELT leaders should work in collaboration with community school practitioners and out-of-school time leaders to develop better ways to measure the impact of partnerships.** More research and analysis is needed to focus specifically on how various models of school-community partnerships are assessing their impact. Given the movement to develop common core standards and more effective student assessments across the country, it would make strategic sense for ELT, community schools, and educational redesign proponents to engage in collaborative work in this area.

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