

# TIME

# It's Not Always Money

*Extending learning time may be easier—and less costly—than you think. Here's how several highly effective schools have done it.*

## Chris Gabrieli

**A**cross the United States, many schools have thrown off the shackles of the traditional school schedule, with its six-and-one-half-hour day and 180-day year. These expanded learning time (ELT) schools, which typically serve at-risk populations—students in poverty, students with special needs, English language learners, and minorities—believe that with more learning time, they can raise student academic achievement, provide a more well-rounded education, and enable teachers to engage in more collaboration and planning. Many ELT schools are closing the achievement gap; broadening the curriculum to include subjects beyond the tested ones; and offering enrichment opportunities in the arts, music, drama, and sports at a time when other schools have cut back in those areas.

With President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan calling for more learning time and bringing federal resources to bear, interest in this reform has grown. Yet in a time of resource challenges, many educators see the cost of expanding learning time as a barrier.

Although some educators are daunted by Benjamin Franklin's admonishment, "Remember that time is money," we would do better to attend to famed UCLA basketball coach John Wooden's exhortation, "If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

The simplest model for expanding learning time—increasing staff teaching time at an hourly rate—may leap to mind first. However, the truth is that scheduled learning time can be expanded far more cost effectively than that. Let's look at what it actually costs existing ELT schools to add learning time and how they do it efficiently.

## What It Costs Now

With at least 1,000 schools across the United States currently expanding learning time, we have empirical evidence on cost, with a reported range from zero dollars to about \$1,300 per student per year. Additional costs can be negligible in schools with a high degree of autonomy, including in the area of compensation. The majority of no-cost extended learning time schools are public charter schools that are exempt from most local regulations and have used extended learning time since their inception. They have recruited teachers and staff who are willing to sign on for all the components of working at the school, including longer hours. In a survey that the National Center on Time and Learning conducted of a sample of 175 U.S. extended learning time schools, more than one-half paid no extra compensation to teachers for working more time.<sup>1</sup>

Further, some schools have been able to include extended learning time at no overall higher cost, even as they pay teachers more. These schools pay an hourly amount or a stipend for added time but have made trade-offs in their programs and expenses (for example, a smaller nonteaching staff) to

balance out the equation. A different no-cost model does not require teachers to teach additional hours. For instance, teachers in Brooklyn Generation School, a public high school, work staggered schedules that provide more time for students without requiring more time from any one teacher.

Massachusetts's Expanded Learning Time Initiative, now in its sixth year, supports more than 10,000 students in 19 schools in nine districts. All participating schools have added at least 300 hours per year to the school schedule and receive \$1,300 per student per year from the state—about 10 percent more cost for about 30 percent more time. Although districts negotiated their own specific compensation structures under their collective bargaining agreements, all teachers at the 19 schools are paid for their incremental time at rates reasonably commensurate with their baseline pay.

In Newport News, Virginia, An Achievable Dream Academy adds time to both the length of the day and the length of the year and pays teachers a flat stipend as compensation. Under an agreement between Green Dot Schools and the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, Green Dot teachers are paid 14 percent above usual New York City rates and commit to work what the contract defines as a "professional day," which includes time for teaching, individual student support, preparation, collaboration, and professional development. The schedule is set at the school level and is longer than the standard New York City school day and year.

### Three Primary Levers

Expanded learning time schools must consider how to manage three levers

that can considerably affect the cost of their programs.

### Teacher Schedules

At nearly every school in the United States today, many teachers begin and end their official work day at the same time each day. Although easy to understand and effortless to manage,



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this approach squanders opportunities. By staggering teachers' work schedules, schools can significantly add to students' total learning time without adding to teacher work time. Moreover, teachers don't all need to expand their schedules the same way. In our 2009 survey, among the 245 schools for which we have detailed staffing data, about one-third have some teachers who do not work extended hours even as others do; one in six of these schools uses staggered scheduling.

Brooklyn Generation School operates for 200 seven-hour days each year, which amounts to 320 more hours each year than conventional schools offer. As a New York City district school that operates within the United Federation of Teachers agreement, Brooklyn Generation does this at no extra cost. School leadership wanted more class-

room time to help students gain crucial skills, more collaboration time for teachers to hone their skills and align their work, and more time for students to link classroom learning to college and career paths.

School leaders at Brooklyn Generation did three things to add learning time. First, they prioritized learning time and allocated their limited resources around their scheduling goals. Second, they asked teachers to take on more diverse responsibilities, which enabled them both to avoid hiring instructional coaches, resource room teachers, and athletic directors and to significantly reduce administrative positions. Last, they staggered the yearly schedule so that although all teachers work 180 days, some teachers are on vacation or in planning periods while students are in class with other teachers.

As part of this staggered schedule, Brooklyn Generation has all students participate in

two monthlong intensive classes taught by a different team of teachers from those teaching in the classrooms. For example, freshmen spend January and May in programs that expose them to careers in such fields as medicine and health, technology and engineering, and media and journalism. Sophomores spend December and March learning about the nonprofit and public sectors and carry out their own real-world projects. Junior- and senior-year intensives focus on college exploration and

preparation and life skills.

Brooklyn Generation does *not* overload its teachers to achieve its plan. In fact, teachers enjoy small class sizes of 14–18 students, have two hours every day for collaborative planning and 20 days each year for professional development, teach three block classes a day, and have a student load of 60 or fewer students. Most important, the school has achieved positive results: Ninety percent of its first cohort of fourth-year students graduated on time, and 90 percent were accepted into college.

The growing movement to grant more autonomy to individual schools, such as through new “innovation school” laws in Massachusetts and Colorado, should enable visionary school leaders to reallocate existing resources and reset schedules in support of promising models like Generation Schools.

### **Partnerships**

A second important resource lever for ELT schools is the use of partners to participate in the work of the school, most often by offering students enrichment opportunities. For example, at A. C. Whelan Elementary School in Revere, Massachusetts, a partnership with the nonprofit organization Playworks ([www.playworks.org](http://www.playworks.org)) provides a trained coach who manages six periods of recess and physical education each day. Previously, special education teachers had staffed these periods. As a result of the partnership, Whelan has improved the quality and reduced the cost of valuable physical activity time for young students and better deployed special education teachers to focus on their specialties.

At Edwards Middle School in Boston, Massachusetts, the nonprofit organization Citizen Schools ([www.citizenschools.org](http://www.citizenschools.org)) offers students apprenticeships with a wide range of volunteer teachers who share their expertise in areas that include law, cooking, urban planning, and computer science. While Citizen Schools staff

and volunteers engage all 6th graders at the school, Edwards teachers focus on small-group academic support for students with the greatest needs, an academic improvement strategy that has helped Edwards achieve dramatic improvements. With a student population that is 90 percent high poverty, 90 percent minority, 25 percent limited English proficient, and 30 percent special needs, the school has raised proficiency rates from 12 percent to nearly 60 percent of all students and currently exceeds the state average in 8th grade math.

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Partnerships with community, higher education, and other groups not only bring new adults and expertise into students’ lives and into the work of public education, but also do so cost-effectively. Especially in the context of public schools that are converting to extended learning time, partnerships can help address cost issues and limit incremental burdens on teachers. In addition, while partners engage students, faculty can either focus on individualized academic support for students—in our experience, the key strategy to raising student achievement—or engage in needed collaborative work around data or instructional strategies.

For example, Playworks served more than 100,000 students at 248 schools in 15 cities across the United States in 2010. The organization highlights not just the importance of recess and well-structured play but also their connection to school learning schedules. Schools that partner with Playworks report that they gain up to 36 hours more class time each year as a result of fewer interruptions around discipline issues.

Similarly, where once Boston’s Citizen Schools and New York’s The After-School Corporation focused on voluntary after-school programs, both organizations now drive the expansion of expanded learning time efforts that are conducted in partnerships between nonprofits and schools in a number of cities and states, a model that merges nonprofit partners’ specialized focuses, lower cost structures, and private resources into an expanded school schedule.

It’s important to note that partnerships are not free, and they do require

added overhead to coordinate and manage. Many ELT schools do not partner, preferring to use existing staff members; they see benefits in simplicity, control, and the opportunity for teachers to deepen relationships with students in electives of mutual interest. Clearly, ELT schools can be effective with robust partnerships, with focused partnerships, or with an independent approach.

### **Adaptive Software**

The newest lever emerging for schools considering expanding learning time is adaptive software, which enables students to learn at their own level and pace, using their own style. Blended learning schools complement the unique value of live teaching with cost-effective online learning. Advocates point to the opportunity to finally graduate from the old factory model of instruction, in which all students receive the same amount and content of teaching in a defined class period, to one in which students progress through topics as they achieve mastery in them.

Adaptive software learning can also

revolutionize the way we think about learning time and space. Students might take radically different amounts of time to reach mastery, shattering our current notions of grade level, and they could learn in or out of school—anywhere they can connect their personal computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Perhaps the most visible ELI school network pursuing adaptive software is Rocketship Education ([www.rsed.org](http://www.rsed.org)), a growing network of five charter elementary schools in California that are built on a hybrid model. Rocketship schools operate on an extended learning time schedule that leverages a daily 100-minute block in learning lab, *where students rotate among independent reading with online quizzes for 30 minutes, online math for 40 minutes, and physical education and health for 30 minutes.* This block is cost-effective. The reading and math blocks require only a noncertified adult to proctor them, and because students are learning individually and independently in the reading and math portions, the ratio of students to adults in the learning lab is high.

Rocketship adopted this design to increase the amount of personalized education that it can offer its students. But the hybrid school model also has cost advantages. First, it enables teachers to maximize classroom time for instruction as they schedule tutors and technology resources for students who need either remediation or acceleration. Second, the school reinvests the cost savings it generates in programs and people that drive school quality. Last, the model enables the schools to operate solely on traditional public school funding without the need for philanthropy.

To date, Rocketship has posted excellent academic outcomes, dramatically narrowing achievement gaps among its predominantly high-poverty student body that includes many English language learners. Other notable blended learning pioneers include a KIPP school

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in Los Angeles, California, and four Carpe Diem schools in Arizona. Carpe Diem, operating at the high school level, *goes considerably further than others in leveraging the power and flexibility of online learning to offer year-round start dates, early graduation, and other distinctive features under the motto “The power to choose—your place (online) or our place (on campus).”*

An exciting variation on this theme has been developed by the New York City School Department under the name School of One, with a nonprofit spin-out called New Classrooms. The core concept is to allow every student a mix of learning modalities, including large-group instruction, small-group support, individual tutoring, and customized online learning. Using a large amount of data and a complex algorithm, School of One software assigns each participating student a “playlist” of instructional modules. This approach not only adds software as a core teaching device but also dynamically optimizes the allocation of finite educational resources—teachers, software, and so on—to students on the basis of their needs, progress, and personal learning styles.

Online learning offers the ultimate bargain in expanding learning time even as it offers the ultimate strategy to entirely personalize learning. It has almost no direct cost per minute or hour, although of course the hardware and software involved are fixed assets

with an initial cost. Hybrid schools, especially at the elementary and middle school levels, typically continue to set a fixed daily schedule and have adults proctoring students while they use the software. But the total cost to increase learning time by relying extensively on adaptive software is clearly well below the cost of any program that relies solely on human instruction.

**Sources for Support**

In considering the financial dimensions of adopting an extended learning time strategy and schedule, educators should look not only to costs but also to opportunities to harness available funding streams. Most obvious is Title I, whose core allowable uses have always included increasing learning time. But other pockets exist as well, such as Perkins funding at the high school level.

Although Title I funds are generally already spoken for in current budgets, they can be flexibly focused on extending learning time. A network of schools in Florida’s Volusia County under the name Plus One schools added one hour each day for student learning and relied chiefly on Title I funding.

A growing set of federal resources is becoming available to support schools seeking to extend their schedules. Most notably, under the new School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, which targets persistently low-performing schools, increased learning time is a mandatory element of both the turnaround and transformation models the program supports. As a result, hundreds of schools across the United States have added more hours to school schedules as part of their turnaround plans.

The federal government will likely be broadening its support for extended learning time, including prioritizing it as an element in the blueprint for Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization. The Time for Innovation Matters in Education (TIME) Act, filed on a bipartisan basis in both chambers of Congress, would support



new extended learning initiatives in a number of states.

Finally, the U.S. Congress and the Obama administration have proposed to modernize the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC), a \$1.1 billion program that supports learning beyond the traditional day but that schools cannot currently use if they expand school schedules for all students. By allowing schools to use these funds to expand the school schedule for all students, the federal government would enable large numbers of districts and schools to consider adopting extended learning time.

At the state level, only Massachusetts currently has funding available solely for extended learning time, but other states are finding resources to support such efforts. For example, in New York, schools have used incremental funding that was made available to high-poverty districts as a result of litigation over funding inequity to expand learning time. In Arizona, the resourceful leadership of a district in Phoenix, Balsz Elementary School District 31, adopted a 200-day calendar for all 2,900 of its K–8 students across five schools; it then funded more than one-half of the 9 percent raise it granted its teachers by accessing an additional 5 percent funding allowed by an otherwise unused provision of Arizona state law that increases funding for districts that expand learning time.

A growing number of districts, even under financial pressure, have chosen to allocate some incremental resources to schools pursuing extended learning time. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; New Orleans, Louisiana; Houston, Texas; and several other districts, extended learning time initiatives rely on district-allocated funds. Chicago, led by new mayor Rahm Emanuel, is working to expand Chicago's school day, currently one of the shortest in the United States,

by 90 minutes a day across all schools. With participating schools receiving \$150,000 and a 2 percent raise for teachers, nine schools have voted, as of September 2011, to adopt the new schedule, with many more schools deciding in the months ahead.

Houston has added five days to its school year and has launched an ambitious turnaround program at up to 20 schools, under the label Apollo 20, that considerably expands learning time to support, among other things, individual tutoring for students at key grades.

Finally, schools can often access private resources through partnerships with community-based and nonprofit



organizations in the form of volunteers and philanthropic support. Higher education partners can often offer federal work-study funds. Although it's generally more attractive to focus chiefly on sustainable public funding sources, many nonprofits attract considerable support and are eager to work with willing schools.

### Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Ultimately, all schools must prioritize among competing opportunities to effectively educate their students. Funding levels for schools certainly vary considerably across states and districts. These variations affect how schools can achieve basic adequacy as well as how flexible they can be in their resources,

but no school has enough money or time to pursue every good idea or potential solution.

Schools that have expanded learning time have not done so because they stumbled onto unlimited new resources or ran out of better ideas on how to invest in their work. On the contrary, whatever the financial arrangement, schools that have adopted extended schedules have done so because they believe these schedules are necessary to accomplish their mission—especially for highly disadvantaged students who are often already behind and who may enjoy little academic support beyond the school walls.

Rather than asking, "How can we afford more time?" more schools need to ask "What amount of learning time do we need to succeed?" just as they should consider class size and other resource questions. The more than 1,000 schools across the United States that are already implementing extended learning time prove that if schools and districts have the will, they can identify and prioritize resources to this end. New federal resources now

make it easier to decide whether this is the moment to modernize our school schedules. The success of many of the extended learning time pioneers proves that adding to learning time can be the core catalyst to successfully attacking the achievement and opportunity gaps that plague U.S. education today. ■

<sup>1</sup>Farbman, D. (2009). *Tracking an emerging movement: A report on expanded-time schools in America*. Boston: National Center on Time and Learning.

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