

A New Day for Learning

It's time to look at changing the length and scope of the school day to help kids succeed.



BY JENNIFER STEDRON

Sonia arrives home from school Friday at 6:30 p.m. It's been a productive day for this 16 year old. Since 7 a.m. she's completed her regular schedule of courses at the high school, as well as met her third grade "reading buddy" for their weekly tutoring appointment, put in internship hours at a local construction firm, and finished her homework (engineering problems from the same firm). Although it's officially the weekend, Saturday morning finds Sonia and her classmates taking in an architecture exhibit at the museum. And in the afternoon, she parks

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herself in front of the local library's computer to send instant messages to her Argentinean pen pal. For Sonia, school life and outside life blend together.

Looking at school hours differently is imperative to achieving high learning goals for all students, according to the report "A New Day for Learning: Why and Why Now?" Conducted by the national Time, Learning and Afterschool Task Force, sponsored by the C.S. Mott Foundation, the report suggests the time is ripe to shatter the "chalk and talk," 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., September to June concept of school, and stretch and reshape learning time in order to improve student achievement. Despite valiant efforts by state education systems to prepare all students equally well for the 21st century, many, especially poor

minority students, struggle to stay in school, let alone meet state standards. Standards that some say ignore a host of equally necessary skills such as leadership, creativity and civic engagement.

When you include summer, nearly 80 percent of students' waking hours occur outside the traditional school day. The report suggests that if states want to win big gains in



REPRESENTATIVE
PATRICIA HADDAD
MASSACHUSETTS

SUMMER CATCH-UP PROGRAMS

Thirty-five states have state-level summer remediation policies targeted to particular subject areas, education goals or populations

education they need to commit to a complete restructuring of learning time—expanding education hours and incorporating enrichment and community-based opportunities so that students have many ways to learn and engage in broadening experiences.

“Tell me why we’re still teaching on the same old calendar?” asks Massachusetts Representative Patricia Haddad about whether the day we have now works for a kid. “If we’re really teaching to the whole child and taking them from point A to point B, it doesn’t necessarily happen in that artificial time frame we’ve created.”

Three examples that expand the traditional time frame—summer learning, out-of-school hours, and a longer school day—illustrate the rewards of such efforts.

SUMMER LEARNING

Summertime, and the living is ... too easy? While most kids from all backgrounds learn at about the same rate during the regular school year, disadvantaged students tend to fall behind during the summer because of a lack of learning opportunities in the home and community. By fifth grade, this summer slippage accounts for approximately two full years’ deficit in reading comprehension levels. “Early differences in summer learning have reverberations throughout kids’ educational development. They account in part for later educational outcomes such as high school completion and whether kids end up going to college,” says Ron Fairchild, executive director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning.

Why then wait until kids are failing classes to give them summer learning opportunities? Reducing the gaps in achievement before kids start school is the goal of New Mexico’s Kindergarten Plus Pilot Project. The optional program for school districts with the greatest percentage of poor students gives participating youngsters at least 40 additional days of school (20 before kindergarten starts and 20

	PROFICIENCY FOR READING	FOR MATH AND SCIENCE	TO MEET HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS	FOR TARGETED STUDENTS, SCHOOLS OR DISTRICTS
Alabama				◆
Alaska				◆
Arkansas				◆
California	◆	◆	◆	◆
Colorado	◆	◆		
Connecticut	◆		◆	◆
Delaware		◆		◆
Florida	◆		◆	
Georgia	■	■		
Idaho	◆			
Illinois		◆		
Indiana			◆	
Iowa	◆			
Kansas	◆			
Kentucky		◆		
Louisiana		◆		
Massachusetts		◆	◆	◆
Minnesota	◆	◆		
Missouri	◆			◆
Nebraska		*		◆
Nevada		◆		
New Jersey		*	◆	
New Mexico				◆
New York		*	◆	◆
Ohio	◆			
Oklahoma	◆			
Pennsylvania		◆		◆
South Carolina		*	◆	
Tennessee		◆		◆
Texas		◆	◆	
Vermont		◆		
Virginia		◆		
Washington				◆
West Virginia	◆	*		
Wyoming		*		

* Math only.

■ All academic subjects.

Source: “State Notes,” Education Council of the States, March 2006.



SENATOR
CYNTHIA NAVA
NEW MEXICO

after) to help them get ready for first grade. During the summer, students learn literacy and math skills as well as good classroom behavior and expectations. The first evaluation showed strong results: Students gained early literacy skills and social maturity, and

parents were more involved. Those results garnered support from the budget committee that last year approved a \$1 million expansion and three-year extension (sponsored by Representative Mimi Stewart and Senator Cynthia Nava). Senator Nava chuckles over

NCSL GRANT OPPORTUNITY FOR STATES WITH AFTER-SCHOOL NETWORKS

Thirty-two networks, supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, bring together educators, after-school providers, businesses and policymakers with the goal of improving after-school programs. They build partnerships between schools and communities, improve program quality, and create financially sustainable programs for all children who need them. More states are joining each year.

NCSL is offering five \$50,000 grants to state legislatures that want to explore comprehensive state policies on expanded learning opportunities, including after-school and summer programs. Only states with statewide after-school networks are eligible.

The 18-month grant will provide monetary support, technical assistance and site visits to leadership teams of state legislators and representatives from the governor's office, the state education agency, and the statewide after-school network. Grants may be housed in the offices of any leadership team member. Proposals are due April 6, 2007, with grants beginning in May. Contact Jennifer Stedron for additional information, jennifer.stedron@ncsl.org, (303) 856-1427.

The Supporting Student Success grant initiative is co-sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.



SENATOR

TOM TORLAKSON

CALIFORNIA

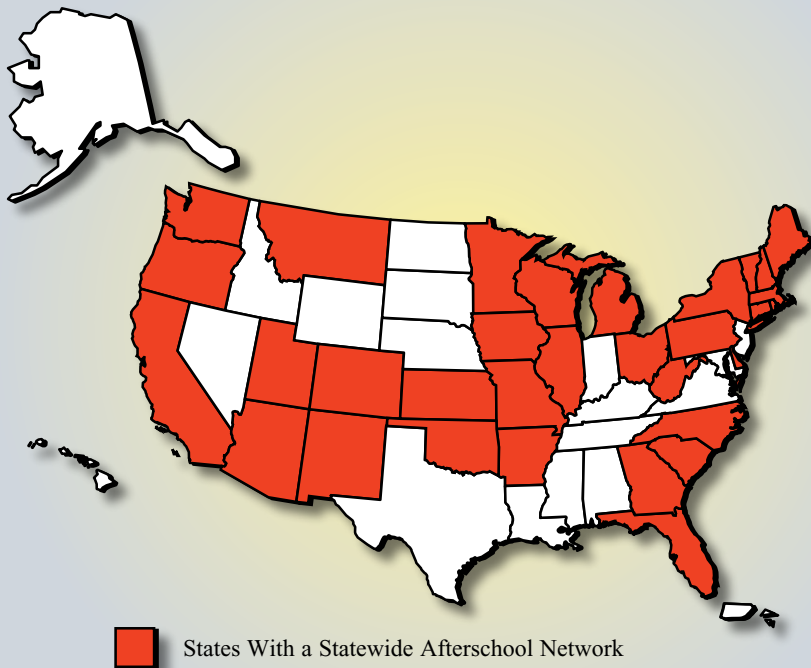
get kids excited about learning," says California Senator Tom Torlakson. "Students' attachment to school naturally increases when they realize they need to attend school to attend the programs."

Club TC (for Teen Connection) in Chula Vista, Calif., sees, on average, 350 middle schoolers pass daily through its doors to spend an hour on academics with licensed teachers or college student tutors, and then embark on a variety of activities from cooking to salsa dancing to computer lab. Tutoring is tailored to individual students in part through constant school-program communication, including meetings to discuss struggling students as well as lunchtime drop-ins with kids and teachers. Staff passions and student requests set the program offerings. With 90 percent of the total student body attending this optional program, kids who can "vote with their feet" clearly indicate they value this time.

Twenty years ago in California the seed for programs like Club TC took root in what is now called the After School Education and Safety Initiative. Proposition 49, which passed in 2002, released \$550 million in state funds, generating an onslaught of grant applications from high-poverty schools. The dual goals of academic assistance and enrichment reflect the theory that engaging students and bolstering their achievement can work. The proof is in the pudding: Evaluations show increases in student attendance, achievement and good behavior from kids in the programs. And a 50 percent decrease in students who must repeat grades is saving the state the massive expense of an extra year of education for many students.

EXPANDED DAY

Imagine walking through a school where teachers look and feel relaxed—no rushing through lessons with one eye on the clock or squeezing meetings into hallway passing periods. From the student perspective, imagine more time to "go deep" into sub-



the program expansion, "It was a little like getting Dad to open his wallet. They wouldn't have done it without strong motivation—the program results."

OUT-OF-SCHOOL

Aside from the obvious benefits of safety and supervision, good before- and after-school programs reinforce the school curriculum and broaden student skills through

enrichment activities that might be absent from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. In fact, there's evidence that the No Child Left Behind act has forced many schools to cut subjects like art and music in order to expand time for reading and math. But those very "extras" are often what keep some children engaged in and attending school.

"I've traveled up and down the state and seen many innovative ways these programs

jects, obtain real-world work experience, and receive extra adult support to help meet the hurdles of graduation and college admittance. Expanded school day models allow this, with great results for at-risk students. One study of Massachusetts's schools found that the nine highest-performing urban schools in the state all extended instructional time, one by as much as 50 percent for some students, through after-school, summer learning, and internship programs.

Consider the 10 Cristo Rey college-prep private high schools enrolling more than 2,400 students nationwide and catering to students in urban settings (91 percent of the students are from minorities). Within the framework of a longer school day and school year, all students participate in work-study jobs with local businesses that offset the cost of their education at these tuition-based schools. Businesses fill a full-time Monday through Friday position with a team of students, and classes are scheduled around kids' once-a-week work-study commitment. The relevance of education to work is emphasized with an end-of-internship project where students present academic research projects related to their jobs to both teachers and employers. In addition, Cristo Rey schools provide academic assistance, counseling, and low student-to-teacher ratios to bolster support.

MORE TIME, BUT NOT MORE OF THE SAME

Still, it's not just more school time that kids need. They need opportunities to develop creativity and be leaders. They need learning time in the real world. In San Antonio, Texas, for example, student teams develop websites for community organizations (such as an at-risk youth center). They present their final projects to fellow students, teachers and the organization's staff. When the websites are up and running, students and teachers stay involved, generating a relationship between school and the community.

"There's a whole new body of thought on how youngsters learn and understand how to use knowledge," says Milt Goldberg, national expert on time and learning and a member of the national Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force. "We know young people are more engaged in learning and are more motivated when activities are not restricted by the traditional classroom structure."

The task force recommends that extra time

support "multiple ways of learning anchored to high standards and aligned to educational resources" in the community. Fairchild believes model summer programs motivate young people to learn through a mix of engaging instruction, field trips and hands-on projects. "Some start with a morning of traditional academics followed by an afternoon of enrichment and recreational activities, while others blend these activities throughout the day," he says. Likewise, required elements of California's before- and after-school initiative include tutoring to help students achieve state academic standards and time to explore enrichment activities that complement school learning.

At Club TA in Chula Vista, a seventh grader who struggled with last week's math lessons gets the help he needs. But he also participates in activities like DJ classes that train kids to work at the school's dances. And many expanded day initiatives include professional development for teachers and college coursework, community service or work experiences for the students.

BARRIERS EXIST

More than 20 years after "A Nation At Risk" recommended five initiatives to improve education, only one—expanding learning time—has not been widely implemented. Increasing learning time doesn't just affect students—it brings changes to parents, businesses, coaches and teachers, as well. Teacher and administrator contracts, transportation systems, school building maintenance, sports teams' practice schedules, and the availability of student labor all change when the school day is lengthened. In addition, parents and students may be opposed to dedicating more time to school if their children are already disinterested and disengaged between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Finally, states that spend an average of 40 percent of their budgets on K-12 education will be hard-pressed to spend more at the expense of other priorities.

The return on investment, however, could be significant. According to a recent analysis by Nobel-prize winning economist James Heckman, investing in additional supports in K-12 results in significantly higher graduation rates and college enrollment for disadvantaged students who have gone to preschool, and decreases criminal convictions and welfare subsidies. But to achieve these

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAWMAKERS

Here's some advice for policymakers from "A New Day for Learning: Why and Why Now?"

◆ Gather useful information including the availability and use of out-of-school resources, exemplary practices within the community and state, community resources, demographic changes and trends, regulations and laws, and present barriers to change.

◆ Collaborate and coordinate among services and across levels of government including local, county, school district, and state and federal agencies, and public and private sectors.

◆ Expand the definition of student success beyond what is currently measured in state assessments. The report suggests assessing skills like analytical thinking and civic engagement as well as broader results like college graduation and full-time employment.

◆ Obtain stable, sufficient and collaborative funding through the coordination of both public and private funding sources.

◆ Establish a cross-discipline working group including decision makers in education, youth development, child care, juvenile justice, health services, business leadership, foundations, cultural/recreational institutions, and parents and students.

◆ Develop an action plan that coordinates local, state and national efforts and resources.

◆ Identify and mitigate obstacles to change, including policies, resource allotment and institutional habits.

◆ Develop a flexible infrastructure and ensure it stays in place through changes in leadership.

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ANewDayforLearning.pdf](http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/ANewDayforLearning.pdf)

results, the entire community must embrace a wider concept of education, one that incorporates time and activities often considered outside the school domain, with experiences that contribute to student achievement. With some states finally taking major steps toward this goal, the question is: Has a "new day for learning" finally dawned? 