

# Successful Intervention: It Takes Time

By finding ways to provide more time for intensive instruction, schools can give struggling students an opportunity to succeed.

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## IN BRIEF

Successful interventions for at-risk students extend and redefine learning time to improve achievement. This article describes five programs—Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS), Academic Acceleration Academy, Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Middle Grade Acceleration Program (M-GAP), and a flexible credit plan—that employ strategies to give struggling students the additional time they need for intensive instruction.

**T**ime, timely, timeline... the words echo in keynote speeches and mission statements devoted to school reform. The National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994) reported “...the time available in a uniform six-hour day and a 180-day year is the unacknowledged design flaw in American education.” In the decade since this report, a number of initiatives have been tried in keeping with the report’s recommendation that “American students must have more time for learning...not to do more of the same, but to use all time in new, different, and better ways” (National Education Commission 1994).





Providing more time for learning is especially crucial for helping at-risk students. The American Federation of Teachers has declared “one of the most effective, standards-aligned intervention methods is to increase the instructional time for struggling students, especially intensive instruction delivered by a trained adult” (Johnson 2001).

Here are examples of five school programs that have effectively extended or redefined time to give struggling students that opportunity.

### **Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS)**

At-risk students at Cerro Villa Middle School in Villa Park, California, have had the opportunity to enroll in the school’s PASS program since 1998. Under the direction of Principal Aileen Sterling, the program uses seven sequential steps to give struggling students more instructional time.

Sixth graders whose scores are below average or below grade level are invited to get a head start on their seventh-grade year by enrolling in the

Summer School Bridge program. In the fall, at-risk seventh graders have individualized instructional programs implemented in a Skills for Success class. Any student who is not maintaining a C average participates in the next two steps, academic advisement and after-school tutorial classes.

If students are failing two or more classes, they spend an additional four hours a week in tutoring and skill-building classes. Those students who fail the same class a second time are placed in an independent learning

program, and those who have failed two classes are enrolled in a mandatory summer school/intersession program. The most reluctant learners still have one last chance: Opportunity for Success, a block of small-group and individualized classes targeting deficiencies in English, history, math, science, and study skills.

### Academic Acceleration Academy

The Academic Acceleration Academy in Rancho Cordova, California, is designed for at-risk sixth graders who score within the 18th to 39th percentiles on achievement tests. Program Coordinator David Knight describes the academy as a “school within a school” with a goal of achieving two years of academic growth in one year’s time. To achieve this, the academy uses six strategies:

- Primary and practice periods for math and language arts;
- Daily computer-assisted learning;
- Weekly homework club;
- Monthly parent workshops;
- Frequent communication; and
- Curriculum-related field trips.

“Academy test data continue to show educationally significant in-year growth in language arts and math for the third year in a row,” says Knight. When data last year showed academy students outperforming their regular sixth-grade counterparts in math, but underperforming in language arts, a remedial language program was added to the curriculum.

### Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)

In a comprehensive redesign of learning time, 38 KIPP schools serving 6,000 students in 15 states operate weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., four hours on Saturday, three to four weeks in the summer, and require two to three hours of homework every night (KIPP Schools, n.d.).

Built on the belief of founders Mike Feinberg and David Levin that there are “no shortcuts to success,” KIPP

## It’s About Time

The FPG Child Development Institute (2004) emphasizes the importance of time as a key element in meeting the needs of individual students and provides strategies to make the best use of learning time, including multiple curriculum entry points, based on pre-assessments of student achievement; self-paced mastery learning; and compacting and telescoping the curriculum.

The National Association of School Psychologists (2003) includes among its recommendations for improving educational success “extended year, extended day, and summer school programs that focus on facilitating the development of academic skills.”

The National Dropout Prevention Center (n.d.) believes that “student cognitive and social development varies for all children...[and it] supports a holistic approach that blends frequent student assessments for diagnostic purposes; flexibility in school scheduling to allow for appropriate and timely instructional interventions; and meaningful out-of-school experiences.”

schools are built on a set of principles known as the Five Pillars:

- High expectations;
- Choice and commitment;
- More time;
- Power to lead; and
- Focus on results.

Open to all students “regardless of prior academic record, conduct, or socioeconomic background,” KIPP schools ensure success with a “Commitment to Excellence” contract signed by students, parents, and teachers; a rigorous curriculum mixed with extracurricular activities; and targeted enrichment field trips.

### Middle-Grade Acceleration Project (M-GAP)

Recognizing that 16-year-old students are better served with their peers in a high school setting than in a middle school, Charleston County School District in South Carolina has a list of overage eighth graders waiting to enter the M-GAP (Adcox 2004). M-GAP is characterized by self-contained, small classes of 15 or fewer students that focus on accelerating learning and motivating students to stay in school.

The two M-GAP classes are staffed with teachers who have strong backgrounds in literacy and math instruction, as well as experience working

with overage students. The curriculum is focused on the Read 180 language arts program and individualized math instruction. Periodic assessments help set individual performance goals for students. Nancy McGinley, the district’s chief academic officer, believes the program is succeeding in its twofold purpose of increasing the likelihood that students will graduate, and decreasing the negative behavior often associated with overage students in middle school.

### Flexible Credit Plan

Next on the intervention horizon are plans like the Boston Public Schools’ proposed redesign of the traditional four-year high school structure so that “advanced students could graduate in three years while struggling students could take up to five years to complete courses in summer school” (Associated Press 2004). The flexible credit plan is not tied to grade-level retention, allowing students to receive credit for those classes passed and repeat only those classes they have failed.

Printed on a coffee mug on the desk of a special education teacher in a Chicago suburb are these words, attributed to William Spady (2001): “All students can learn and succeed, but not in the same day in the same way.” By adding and redefining time, as these five programs are doing or plan-

ning to do, educators can take a giant step in ensuring academic recovery for all students. ■

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### WEB RESOURCES

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has made available a number of published articles related to time and learning, including "Strategies To Increase Time and Learning." [www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentid=392](http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentid=392)

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) examines the research related to time and learning in a report that also includes an extensive bibliography. [www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/4/cu8.html](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/4/cu8.html)

WestEd provides an informative Policy Brief, "Making Time Count." [www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/making\\_time\\_count.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/making_time_count.pdf)

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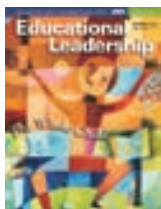


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