

# ELT: Expanding and Enriching Learning Time for All

*“We can no longer afford an academic calendar designed when America was a nation of farmers who needed their children at home plowing the land at the end of each day. That calendar may have once made sense, but today, it puts us at a competitive disadvantage...That is why I’m calling for us not only to expand effective after-school programs, but to rethink the school day to incorporate more time.” —President Barack Obama*

**PROPOSAL:** Policymakers should support initiatives not only to extend the school day and year to give kids more time to learn, but also to expand the ways students learn through enrichments and diverse activities tailored to each school’s needs. Schools should form cost-effective partnerships with community organizations to expand kids’ learning time by at least 30 percent through a cohesive learning day that also meets the needs of working parents. This school reform strategy should be encouraged and supported through public funding.

## Why Expand Learning Time Now?

Across the nation, public schools are operating on an entrenched schedule of approximately 180 days a year, seven hours or less per day, with students spending fewer than a quarter of their waking hours in class. The practical need for this schedule expired decades ago. Nonetheless, American students, including those with the fewest advantages, are saddled with insufficient learning time to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century academic goals, or experience the enriched education all families want for their children.

With President Barack Obama leading the call to resize the school day and year, we have an unprecedented opportunity to bring effective and affordable Expanded Learning Time (ELT) strategies to scale. Experimentation is under way in multiple cities and states, where educational leaders acknowledge the reality that if students are expected to learn more, they need more time to learn. It’s not enough, however, to give kids an extra “power hour” to master challenging content. To keep kids mo-

tivated all the way through high school graduation, they must have time to discover and build on their passions through sports, arts, internships and other healthy endeavors that motivate them to overcome all obstacles to success.

Through its “Race to the Top” incentive grants and “Invest in What Works” innovation grants, the federal government is demanding extraordinary school reform in exchange for greater school spending. There has never been a more promising moment to expand the time and ways kids learn, to bring new community partners into schools, to evaluate what works, and to devise school schedules that meet the needs of kids and working parents and the demands of a global workplace.

## The Problem

Across America, too few students attain proficiency in core content areas, and too few earn enough credits to graduate. Pressed for time, schools concentrate on fundamental

literacy, math and traditional curricular requirements. Many are forced to limit the experiential learning through which kids develop wide-ranging skills, creative and analytical habits of mind and the ability to team up to solve problems. Kids face a future where every facet of their lives will cycle through constant change – from how they communicate to how they do business. They’re getting short-changed on opportunities to develop the capabilities they will need to build lasting careers and lead productive lives.

Expanding the school day involves re-thinking every part of the school schedule and structure. It involves bringing more community partners into schools to collaborate with teachers, and raising the funds to support more teaching and learning time.

## Solutions

Most cities and states with ELT initiatives focus on schools that are chronically low-performing, and students who are at the low end of the achievement gap. A significant proportion of charter schools are launching with school-day schedules that run from morning to evening. Foundations that invest heavily in education reform are fueling active ELT experimentation, with the Broad Foundation, among others, helping to establish the National Center for Time and Learning, and the C.S. Mott Foundation recently launching a 10-city initiative to catalyze a “New Day for Learning.” Among numerous state efforts is the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative, which adds at least 300 hours of academics and enrichment to 26 schools.

Expanded Learning Time/New York City (ELT/NYC) is a three-year demonstration project that seeks to expand learning time by at least 30 percent in 10 New York City public and middle schools, with more than 2,300 students enrolled. The After-School Corporation (TASC) manages the project, which launched in the 2008-09 school year, in partnership with the New York City Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Development. Its goal is to improve the academic achievement of young people while supporting their healthy social, physical, creative and civic development.

The initiative is being independently evaluated.

The ELT/NYC project helps school leaders reorganize their schools to integrate their existing resources with those of partnering community-based organizations (CBOs), with additional funds raised from public and private sources. Each school gathers teachers, parents and community partners under the principal’s leadership to chart curriculum and activities tailored to the school’s goals for its students.

Learning time is expanded to 6 PM every day school is in session to meet the needs of working parents. Every ELT activity responds to a specific social, cultural or academic need of students. Compared with many after-school programs operated by community organizations in public schools, activities are more directly connected to the school day.

## ELT/NYC Programs Share These Core Elements:

- 1) Students experience at least 30 percent more learning time than they would in a traditional school day.
- 2) Each school partners with a lead community organization. CBO staff members lead activities that are diverse and engaging. In addition to literacy and math, these might include music, visual arts, science, robotics, debate, healthy cooking, community service and athletics.
- 3) The principal leads the school’s ELT/NYC program and assures that activities after 3 PM are connected to the school day. The principal embraces the goal of expanding learning time for the whole school.
- 4) CBO and school staff collaborate and adapt. A fulltime CBO program leader works with an education liaison from the school staff.
- 5) Students have supper or snack.
- 6) ELT/NYC programs meet sustainable cost models. The cost per student is \$1,600 in programs with more than 300 students, and \$1,800 in smaller programs.

## Lessons Learned In Year One of ELT/NYC:

- 1) Schools can achieve a replicable ELT cost model of less than \$2,000 per pupil by partnering with community organizations.
- 2) The principal's full commitment is the single most important factor in a program's success. When principals actively adopt ELT as their vision for one unified learning day, schools avoid the disconnect that can occur with CBO after-school partners.
- 3) By observing ELT activities, principals become aware of what much homework looks like; several took steps to make it more interesting or relevant.
- 4) ELT/NYC schools achieve higher attendance rates than schools with traditional after-school programs: 90 percent attendance in the school day and 89 percent expanded learning time attendance.
- 5) Expanded learning works best when school and CBO staff members are fully integrated and operate as one team, jointly participating in school-wide planning and events.
- 6) Team-teaching among teachers and CBO staff members is a promising model for building relationships and aligning curriculum.
- 7) It's logistically challenging but essential for school and CBO staff to make time for joint planning and professional development.
- 8) Schools can support ELT through multiple funding streams including federal Title I, Title III, AmeriCorps and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, tax levies, magnet funds, per pupil allocations and local and state funding streams such as New York State's Contracts for Excellence.

## Recommendations

- 1) Policymakers should support ELT initiatives that don't stop at remediation or traditional academic instruction, but provide experiences that support and inspire kids to reach academic and social goals. These should include a rich mix of hands-on activities such as science, fitness and service-learning.
- 2) ELT programs should provide at least 30 percent more learning time; meet the needs of working parents by providing a full day of learning; and incorporate a community perspective and staff members other than teachers, such as artists, youth development professionals, AmeriCorps members and parents.
- 3) Schools should align their new and existing school and after-school funds and staff members to create one cohesive program for students that lasts across all school hours.
- 4) Schools must be provided with late buses so no child is excluded due to distance or disability.
- 5) Cities and states should rely on intermediary agencies to help broker partnerships and capture all the resources of communities to expand learning time. Intermediaries should help schools plan and budget, identify excellent program content and assure efficient use of resources.
- 6) Congress should enact the federal TIME Act to expand promising ELT initiatives and seed new ones.
- 7) Federal funds devoted to educational innovation and the "Race to the Top" should support school-and-community partnership ELT initiatives.

## About TASC

The After-School Corporation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to giving all kids opportunities to grow through after-school and summer activities that support, educate and inspire them.

TASC's vision is that kids from all backgrounds will have access to the range of high quality activities beyond the school day that every family wants for their children: experiences that support their intellectual, creative and healthy development and help them to be their best, in and out of school.



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