Interest in expanding hours for students to master academic, social, and workplace skills is mounting.

CONSENSUS ON INCREASING LEARNING TIME BUILDS

By Catherine Gewertz
From *Education Week*

UNDER enormous pressure to prepare students for a successful future—and fearful that standard school hours don't offer enough time to do so—educators, policy makers, and community activists are adding more learning time to children's lives.

"This issue is hot right now," said Bela Shah, senior program associate for after-school initiatives at the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. "There's a real understanding that we have to do more, and that everyone has to take responsibility for it."

Twenty-five years ago, the still-resonant report *A Nation at Risk* urged schools to add more time—an hour to the usual six-hour day and 20 to 40 days to the typical 180-day year—to ward off a "rising tide of mediocrity" in American education. Today, city, school, state, and national leaders are engaged in a renewed effort to do just that.

"People are talking about this now," said An-Me Chung, program officer for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which has financed school-community partnerships and after-school programs since the 1930s. The philanthropy has also taken a leading role in convening scholars, practitioners, and policy makers to rethink the role time should play in learning.

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"They're stepping back and taking a much more holistic approach than they did even eight years ago," Chung said of those who have been discussing expanded learning. "They realize we've got to think about time and learning in more than just a piecemeal way."

Hundreds of Initiatives

The idea of finding more time for learning has generated activity nationwide. A study for the Center for American Progress found that more than 300 initiatives to extend learning time were launched between 1991 and 2007 in high-poverty and high-minority schools in 30 states. A compilation of extended-day activity at the state level by the Education Commission of the States found more than 50 efforts since 2000.

Adding learning time takes many forms. It can mean freeing students from the clock by letting them complete assignments on a computer, in their pajamas, at 2 A.M., or letting them take five years to finish high school, as the Boston district allows. It can mean forging better links between children's schools and the many learning experiences in their cities, as Providence, RI, has done, by building "afterzones" of networked after-school programs for its middle-schoolers, from sports and fashion design to college guidance counseling, and providing the wheels to get them there.

Most often, retooling time means extending the school day or school year to accommodate the burgeoning list of skills and areas of knowledge students need to thrive as adults.

'A Better Way'

At Grove Patterson Academy, a regular public K-8 school in Toledo, OH, an 8-hour day and 192-day year afford time for all 400 children to have 90 minutes of daily, uninterrupted reading, to study Spanish or German, explore music and art, engage in sports, and to work with mathematics specialists.

The extra time—the equivalent of 49 more days in the year—makes possible an interdisciplinary-learning approach that principal Gretchen Bueter calls invaluable. Children do math problems in German, boost their Spanish and geography skills in social studies class, and learn graphing and numeric value in music. Teachers have daily planning time together to coordinate coursework across the curriculum.

"This is a better way of preparing children to go out there and be ready for whatever they do," Bueter said.

Among other high-profile efforts to extend learning time:

- New York City and its teachers' union added 37.5 minutes a day to the first four days of the week so teachers can tutor underperforming students in small groups.

• Eight communities are seeking grants from the Mott Foundation to implement a new form of expanded learning that envisions a "seamless learning experience" obtained inside and outside the schoolhouse, and supported by a web of community services.

• In Massachusetts, a widely watched, three-year-old initiative to expand learning time gives districts about $1,300 per pupil to add 30% more time to the school year. Leaders of the program are advising at least seven other states interested in doing something similar.

"People see that we can't consistently achieve our goals inside the usual time frame," said Chris Gabrieli, co-chairman of the National Center on Time and Learning, which advises the 26 schools implementing the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time initiative. "We're way short of the mark."

With backing from both national teachers' unions, U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy introduced legislation last August that would provide federal funding for districts or schools wishing to follow the Massachusetts example.

Last summer, the National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University launched a $5.2 million public-policy campaign to promote funding for summer programs, especially for children whose families cannot provide the array of educational experiences children of wealthier parents enjoy.

The campaign has publicized findings by Johns Hopkins sociologist Karl Alexander, who traces two-thirds of the achievement gap between students of less-advantaged and more-affluent backgrounds to summer learning loss by poorer children. It also cites research that suggests children with few good summer-activity options have more health problems, such as obesity and diabetes.

Ron Fairchild, executive director of the center, believes that the rush of activity on the local, state, and national levels shows that the importance of out-of-school time to children's learning is finally getting the recognition it deserves.

"We're starting to see a real tipping point on this issue," he told a group of advocates who gathered in Washington last July to lobby Congress for funding.

On-and-Off Debate

Numbers have no doubt helped tip the debate. The Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers found that in 2006, 21 states required a school day of less than five hours or had no requirement. Only three states mandated school years longer than 180 days.

Education Resource Strategies, a nonprofit consulting firm, studied in 2006 how many hours per year students spent in school in 10 urban districts. The results varied from 914 in Chicago to

1,274 in Houston. And that's what researchers call "allocated school time," which includes lunch, passing periods between classes, and the like. Not all allocated school time is class time, and even less is high-quality instructional time, experts say.

Urban schoolchildren didn't always spend so little time in class. In the mid-1800s, some big cities kept schools open more than 250 days a year. New York City's schools were open year-round, with only a three-week break in August. But by the middle of the 20th century, most U.S. schools had settled into the late-summer-to-late-spring standard, with a solid block of summer vacation.

In *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education said improving American education would require higher expectations, better teaching, and better curricula. But it would also take "significantly more time," the commission said, used more effectively.

Adding more school time has been discussed and tried intermittently since the report's release in 1983. But the idea has taken hold with particular fervor in the past decade, driven in large part by the academic-standards movement, which has sought to define what students should know, and heightened attention to achievement gaps between students of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, which showed how far many children still had to go.

The No Child Left Behind Act added urgency to the rethinking of time, observers say, by dangling consequences over schools that don't progress briskly enough. The globalizing economy, meanwhile, popularized the idea that to thrive, young people must master not only core academics, but also a set of "21st-century skills" such as critical thinking and teamwork.

Also fueling the rethinking of time was the expansion of federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which seek to use after-school time for a blend of academics and enrichment. The program grew from $40 million annually in 1998 to a $1 billion a year by 2002, and has retained support near that level ever since.

Time in Charter Schools

The rise of charter schools also has given educators something to think about. Two-thirds of those public schools use their freedom from most regulations to adopt longer days or longer years, according to the Center for Education Reform, a Washington group that tracks charters and other forms of school choice.

Experts often point to schools run by the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP, as an example of what more time can do. KIPP's overwhelmingly low-income stu-

dents have made strong gains in a rigorous, college-preparatory program that spans 8-1/2 hours a day, every other Saturday, and three weeks of the summer.

Cross-Fertilization

The push to add more time to learning also has accelerated a cross-fertilization of the education, youth-development, and after-school worlds. Recreation and job-training programs often add academic help, for instance. More schools are seeking to replicate for children of low-income families the rich array of learning experiences—from art class to internships—that better-off children receive outside school walls.

"Why should we think about the learning day as ending at the school door?" said Milton Goldberg, former executive director of the National Commission on Excellence in Education.

"People aren't just talking about having more learning time," he said. "They're talking about a fundamentally different conception of when and where kids learn."

The C.S. Mott Foundation convened leaders of the education and after-school worlds in 2005 to help define that new conception of learning.

In a 2007 report, "A New Day for Learning," the Mott panel urged erasing the distinction between school and after-school, and creating a "seamless" experience that would impart academic, cultural, and civic learning, along with such skills as critical thinking and teamwork. It would extend beyond the schoolhouse, with "no final bell." That approach requires intense, communitywide collaboration, the report said, and "a total rethinking of purposes, practices, and personnel."

Most of the recent expanded-time efforts share some core beliefs. One is that children need more time and opportunity to learn what they need to know. Another is that more time must mean new modes of learning—not just longer vocabulary lists. The initiatives also seem to acknowledge that schools can't do it alone. Educators have long linked up with community groups to extend and enrich students' learning, as evidenced by the century-old Community Schools movement.

Even with those tenets in common, though, the initiatives vary in philosophy and approach.

One type operates as an academic intervention for the lowest-performing students. In the Miami-Dade County, FL, district's former School Improvement Zone, for instance, struggling schools operated on a longer day and year, and the extra time was dedicated exclusively to core academic subjects.

Other extended-time efforts, such as the Massachusetts initia-

tive, are fundamental school redesigns that put the school district squarely in charge of improving performance by aligning the enrichment and academic components. Unlike some programs, all children in the school must participate.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said that if teachers have an integral role in shaping the additional learning time, both students and teachers can be richly rewarded. Students would have time to approach learning differently—in small groups, for instance, or in a more hands-on way—and teachers would build stronger skills and experience more job satisfaction.

"It's not just someone saying, 'We're going to add time to the day, and you're going to have to work it,'" Weingarten said. "It can be a professional and collegial practice that builds their capacity and is a big morale booster."

Staggering Schedules

Extending time doesn't necessarily mean all teachers would work longer hours, she added. At a New York charter middle school run jointly by the city and the United Federation of Teachers, the additional hours are covered on a staggered schedule.

Adding time can be expensive and politically tricky, said Elena Silva, a senior policy analyst for the Washington-based think tank Education Sector.

A longer school year can run into resistance from certain business interests, such as the amusement-park industry, that employ many teenagers and depend on tourism for revenue, Silva said, and from middle class parents who seek more time with their children and resent the disruption to vacations.

A longer day tends to draw less opposition, she said, although high school athletics departments often consider it a problem because it cuts into traditional practice times.

Gabrieli, of the National Center on Time and Learning, said schools in the Massachusetts initiative have found a longer day to be more cost-efficient than a longer year.

Cost is "absolutely the first thing that comes up" when policy makers consider adding time, Silva said.

Another 2008 study for the Center for American Progress found that the annual cost of adding 30% more time to a school schedule ranged from $287 to $720 per pupil, depending on whether the extra time was staffed with paraprofessionals or with certified employees on a salaried basis. It could be lower if current staffing is reallocated or a stipend system is used, the study says, and higher if newly hired certified staff members are used. ▶

Karen Hawley Miles, executive director of Education Resource Strategies, said schools typically find that they have to spend about 16% more to boost time by 30%.

One of the concerns sparked by the movement to add time is that it risks simply being an extension of ineffective instruction.

"There are some principals and superintendents who think that more time on task means more of what is already happening," said Lucy N. Friedman, the president of The After-School Corp., or TASC, a nonprofit group in New York City that is managing a new initiative to expand time by 30% in 11 schools there. "We think kids need a much broader approach to learning."

Youth Workers' Role

Some leaders in the after-school sector worry that their deep expertise in youth development will be left behind in the accelerating dialogue about extended time, at a great cost to children.

"Youth workers have a lot to offer in this current debate. But we'd better hurry—I see a fast-moving train here, and time may be running out," Jane Quinn wrote in a column for the publication *Youth Today*. Quinn is the assistant executive director for community schools at the New York City-based Children's Aid Society, which provides a wide range of services to children and families, on and off school sites. It operates 22 Community Schools jointly with the city's department of education.

Ellen Gannett, director of Wellesley College's National Institute on Out-of-School Time, recalled getting a sinking feeling when she visited an extended-day program in Florida and saw middle schoolers being lectured by a teacher at 4:30 P.M. When she asked a staff member when the students might be able to interact, or learn in more animated ways, she was told that those things could happen when they left the building at 5:30.

"Using time without a sense of personal, relational connection is a big red flag for me," Gannett said. "Spending afternoons alone at computers without connecting with friends or a caring adult. This is when I get nervous."

Those involved in expanded learning efforts are well aware that such programs are a work in progress. But the movement's promise is starting to bring together people from fields that devote themselves to children, but haven't always worked closely together.

"We have realized that if we are going to make a differences in the lives of kids, we have to help them succeed in school," said Chung of the Mott Foundation. "School, after-school, and youth development can't do it alone, nor should they have to. "We are all educators. We need to get out of those silos. And there is a real effort to do that."