

SPENDING MONEY WISELY

GETTING THE MOST FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGETS



LOWERING THE COST OF EXTENDED LEARNING TIME: Creating Financial Sustainability

Opportunity Brief • Getting Started • Lessons from the Field

by Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, Claire Sullivan



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

www.dmccouncil.org

OPPORTUNITY BRIEF

LOWERING THE COST OF EXTENDED LEARNING TIME: Creating Financial Sustainability



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

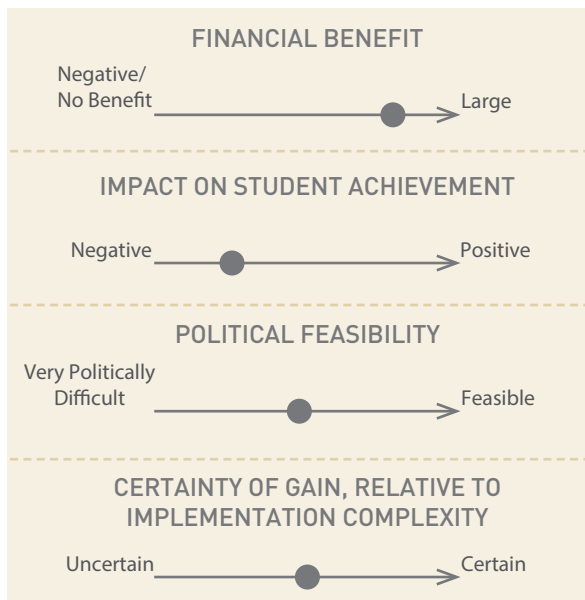
The traditional school calendar of 180 days, each about 6½ hours long, has not changed much in the last half century or more. But, over this period of time, the needs of students have increased. There are more students in poverty, more English-language learners, and more students with disabilities in public schools today than before. In addition, standards have risen, first with No Child Left Behind, and again with Common Core State Standards. Yet, the school day and year have not changed in response. In addition, instructional time for academics has growing competition from other needs like social and emotional supports and bullying prevention.

Some districts have responded to this time crunch by offering extended learning time (ELT) through a longer school day or longer school year at some schools. This common sense approach has been

essential to the success of nearly all high-performing urban charter schools and embraced by a growing number of traditional urban schools.

Most ELT efforts target two extra hours a day, but some target only one extra hour a day. Other districts extend learning time by providing four to eight weeks of summer school.

Increasing time to learn and time for teachers to plan together can be a key lever to raising achievement; the challenge is to implement this in a cost-effective manner. The majority of ELT efforts began as grant-funded activities; sustaining these efforts under the operating budget after the grants dried up has often proven problematic.



As districts experiment and pioneer ELT, a number of strategies are emerging as to how to increase learning time in an affordable and sustainable way. Lower-cost ELT is not any more difficult to implement and does not generate more or less political pushback than its higher-priced alternatives. Extended learning time is in its infancy, and this brief draws upon emerging practices, with less of a research base than others in the series.

Background

Since extended learning time is nearly always bundled with other reforms, little research exists as to the effectiveness of ELT specifically, since its effects cannot be separated from the other changes taking place at the same time. The research does suggest, however, that when implemented well and as part of comprehensive reform efforts, a longer school day or school year has helped raise academic outcomes for students – especially for students who struggle academically.¹ The key benefits of ELT are:

1. More instructional time for students for core academics and related extra help
2. More time for students for non-core enrichment activities such as PE, art, and music
3. More time for teachers to plan, analyze data, and receive professional development
4. Summer learning-loss prevention

Extended learning time has been a key element of many successful school turnaround efforts. One high-poverty urban middle school in Massachusetts, for example, raised proficiency rates in ELA from 23% to 64% from 2006 to 2011. The school leaders credit ELT as a critical component of their improvement plan. (It is worth noting that some of these impressive gains began before the start of ELT, and some of the gains diminished under new school leadership; it is a reminder that more time is not a silver bullet, but an important part of a comprehensive plan.)

The downside to this promising strategy is the cost. Based on a DMC review of published research and district profiles, nearly all existing ELT efforts in traditional public schools (i.e., not charter schools) started with a significant increase in per-pupil spending, often from short-term funding sources.

A typical school spends roughly \$1,000 to \$1,500 per student for ELT, with a few spending \$700 and some spending well over \$2,500. In a recent detailed cost study of five ELT schools, there was a wide variance in the costs associated with adding fairly similar programming for students. The variation came in two forms: how much extra time was needed to provide more academic interventions, the arts, and teacher planning time, and how much was paid for each extra hour. One school added just 45 minutes per day while others added the equivalent of over two hours per day. One school paid 90% of the standard

hourly rate for the additional time (9% more salary for 11% more teacher time) while others paid just half the standard rate (10% more pay for 20% more time).²

In nearly all cases, schools secured funds from state, federal, or private grants, sometimes with additional dollars from the district’s operating budget. Based on interviews with leaders who started ELT efforts, limited time or attention was devoted to planning for long-term financial sustainability. The focus was on securing funds to get started; whether more dollars would be available to scale up efforts to other schools in the district or to sustain the first schools when their grants ended would be addressed later. As School Improvement Grants (SIG), Race to the Top (RTTT), and other startup funds dry up, some districts have realized that their early decisions have created future financial headaches, as it committed the entire district to less sustainable rules and expectations.

In its relatively short history, a number of promising efforts have already come to a halt due to lack of funds. One school in Pennsylvania extended its school year to 195 days in 2009, but in 2012 it returned to the traditional 180-day calendar because of state budget cuts. Similarly, an elementary school in Florida tried a 200-day calendar for one year before abandoning it because of insufficient financing. Any plan for starting ELT should also include a plan for continuing the efforts for years and decades to come (assuming good outcomes and academic return on investment).

Financial sustainability comes in two forms. The first is to lower the cost of ELT and the other is to ensure a secure funding stream. Virtually every benefit of ELT has a lower-cost option. Many of these options can be locked out if initial decisions do not lay the appropriate groundwork from the start.

Lower-cost options for more core academics and related extra help

Lengthening the school day by one or two hours to allow students to receive more time learning to read, master math or English, or to speak English is often at the heart of many ELT efforts. This longer school day for students is typically accompanied by a longer school day for teachers, who in turn expect more pay for more hours worked.

A very common, but expensive and likely unsustainable solution is to negotiate a proportional pay raise for teachers. Adding 30% to a teacher’s day (about two hours of extra time) adds about 16% to a school’s budget or \$720/student.³ If all other school-based salaries are increased, such as paraprofessionals, secretaries, etc., the cost increase is, of course, larger. In an effort to overcome teacher resistance, some districts have paid north of 16% raises for just one extra hour of teacher time.

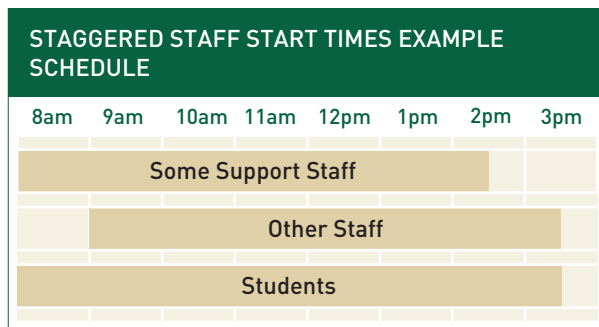
A sense of fairness and practical reality suggest that if teachers work a longer day, they will be paid more (although this is

not true in many charter schools). Therefore, options that extend the school day for students, but not for teachers are lower-cost alternatives. This includes:

- **Staggered teacher start times**

In this model, all staff work the traditional school day, but they do not all start work at the same time. Some staff such as guidance, art, music, PE, library, social workers, and some special education and ELL teachers begin their day at, for example, 8:00 a.m. and work until 2:30 p.m., while other teachers start at 9:00 a.m. and work until 3:30 p.m. All students now have a 7½ hour school day while teachers continue to have a 6½ work day, thus extending instruction by an hour at potentially no added cost (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1



Source: The District Management Council

- **Blended learning supported by paraprofessionals**

Historically, learning has required a teacher, but as blended learning matures, some schools are extending instruction without the need for teachers to work a longer school day. Students spend extra time learning online with lower-cost paraprofessionals monitoring and addressing logistical concerns.

If one paraprofessional, rather than a teacher, supports a class of 20 students, the extra cost drops by roughly 60%. If a lab or library is used with 40 students to a paraprofessional, the cost of two extra hours a day of blended learning drops to less than \$150 a student (plus the cost of technology at approximately \$1,000 a seat). Assuming 40 students to a lab, and replacing everything every five years, technology adds an additional \$200/ student. In the end, two hours a day of targeted, personalized instruction is provided for \$350 a student, not \$1,500. Key to the effectiveness of this approach is a structure in which the adult (paraprofessional) is not in a teaching role, but present to monitor behavior and address technical glitches. Because the

technology is a capital item, unlike teacher time, this investment can be used during the regular school day at no additional cost.

- **Make better use of the existing school day**

If the goal is to add two hours of instructional time each day for students, then this might be achieved by squeezing one more hour of learning out of the existing day, and then adding just an hour to the school day, thus potentially halving the cost.

In some middle and high schools, students have study halls, time in “resource rooms” that provide little direct instruction, or electives that do not interest them. If this time were used for supplemental instruction and were structured so teachers only help students already on their roster, then teachers would have more time with their students, but not more students to know and grade. Not much extra prep is required either. This may require a change in collective bargaining agreements, because some teachers will be teaching one more section each day. However, since this extra section does not increase the length of the workday or the number of students a teacher must instruct, any added pay to be negotiated is likely to be less than the cost of the teacher’s working longer days.

- **Have teachers focus on teaching, not other school duties**

In many schools, teachers perform school duties, such as monitoring lunch and patrolling the halls. This, too, is time that could be reallocated for instruction. Paraprofessionals can be asked to take on these tasks.

- **Have a longer regular school day**

Another low-cost option for a longer school day is to have a longer regular school day. Surprisingly, some schools in a given district have a longer school day than others, often just driven by history. Before paying for extra time, ensure that a longer day cannot be had for free. This will not likely provide enough time for a full ELT effort, but it might reduce the cost. Most negotiations over extra pay for extra teacher time start like this: “If you want me to work 20% more, then pay me 20% more.” Like most negotiations, the final outcome is seldom this straightforward, but the idea is if teachers feel they are only being asked to work 15% more, for example, because part of this extra time is not really extra compared to other schools in the district, then their opening bid might be for just 15% extra, not 20%. This could save \$375 a student.

- **Lengthen the class period**

Equally quirky is that in a given district, some schools (especially middle schools) have 40-minute

periods, while others have longer periods such as 48-minute, or even 55-minute periods. Regardless, all students get one period of each core subject a day. Simply lengthening math and English classes from 40 to 55 minutes a day adds 45 hours of instruction a year for each subject at no cost; this is the equivalent of lengthening the school day by 30 minutes every day, and at no cost. The longer periods are possible through a combination of reducing time between class, having a slightly shorter lunch, and holding a quicker home-room. In some cases, it requires dropping one period from the schedule (such as moving from an eight-period day to a seven-period day); this may mean reducing the number of electives or making foreign language an elective.

- **Target pay increases strategically with an eye to the future**

The first deal a district cuts for ELT pay may set the standard for decades to come. Plan carefully from the start. Noted economist John Maynard Keynes postulated that wages are “downward sticky,” meaning that even when outside forces should lower wages, such as during periods of high unemployment, wages tend not to go down. In short, people hate pay cuts.

Some districts have offered fairly generous increases for longer school days; armed with ample funds from School Improvement Grants or private foundations, they could afford to be generous. But when dollars get tight, it is human nature to fiercely resist doing the same work for less money. For example, teachers might have worked two extra hours a day for a 15% raise if this were all the district could afford, but they are much less likely to accept that same 15% after the grant ends if they already had a 20% raise when grant dollars were flowing. The first negotiation for extra pay for extra time sets a precedent for years to come. It is best to act as if money is tight, because it is likely to be tight in the near future.

How extra pay is provided also has a long-term impact on future costs. Offering a stipend of \$X (say \$5,000) can be less expensive over time than a percentage increase (say 10%), which might equal \$5,000 at first. As teachers gain seniority and move up the pay scale, 10% grows into more absolute dollars, but a flat stipend does not. In some states a stipend does not add to future pension costs, but salary increases do. Who gets paid extra also has a big impact on financial sustainability. Paying only staff that must extend their day, but not others (elementary specialists, guidance, etc.), can also trim the total cost and help improve sustainability. In interviews, many involved in starting ELT

efforts said that when funds were available, they assumed all staff in the building would get the extra pay and work a longer day. This seems very equitable and eases implementation, but, unfortunately, it can lock the school (or district) into a model that cannot be funded in the future.

When considering options for extending the school day, it is also important to consider costs beyond teacher compensation. Some school-wide costs such as administration, front office, security staff, custodial and utilities may also increase. These costs are mostly tied to time, rather than number of students. If ten children or 100 stay at school longer, these costs may increase by the same amount; by contrast, the extra-teacher costs increase proportionately as more students are served. For small schools, this could be a big deal, and should be carefully managed from the beginning.

Lower-cost options for more arts enrichment

In some schools, the goal of ELT is not more academic instructional time, but rather to restore arts and enrichment that have been pared back over time. To meet this need, a few cost-effective alternatives are available beyond extending the day for all staff and raising salaries proportionately. This allows the goals of ELT to be met while limiting the added expense.

- **Engage partners**

Some districts have found it easier and less expensive to use community-based or for-profit partners to provide afterschool enrichment. Since these organizations can draw upon volunteers, non-certified teachers, or non-union staff, they can be less costly. A typical teacher earns about \$40 per hour fully loaded (up to \$60 in some districts), but outside partners can sometimes provide services at a lower cost.

It can be easier to engage cost-effective partners to provide non-core instruction than core instruction. Teaching math, reading, and English to struggling students is a skill, and struggling students need and deserve highly-effective teachers. Having volunteers and lower-paid staff may save money, but there is no reason to believe they will be effective teachers. The skill set required to provide quality programming in art, PE, and other non-core offerings may be more widely available and at a lower cost from outside providers.

- **Staff with fewer adults**

Many typical afterschool activities have relatively higher student-teacher ratios. Band, track, and drama all might have one teacher for 30 or even 50 students. If extended-day arts and enrichment were structured more like afterschool arts and enrichment, then costs

would drop. Automatically extending the during-the-day class size rules to extended-day programs may be a costly decision.

This option dovetails nicely with the concept of ensuring that only targeted staff be required (and paid) to work a longer day. For example, since IEPs do not change, special education teachers need not work a longer day if the goal is added arts and enrichment. The same is true of guidance and even classroom teachers. In most schools with ELT, all staff (or at least all certified school staff) stay for a longer day. The simplicity and equity of this approach come at a significant price.

Lower-cost options for more teacher-planning time

An often-cited benefit of a longer school day is that teachers have more time to plan, look at data, collaborate, work with coaches, share best practices, and get feedback from principals. This is seldom the primary driver for ELT, but is often part of the plan. Since ELT seems to work best as part of a comprehensive and coherent reform effort, this could be a critical component of ELT design.

If teacher-planning time can be accomplished during the regular school day, perhaps a shorter ELT period is needed. In most schools, adding an hour costs half as much as adding two hours. If some of the need can be met during the school day, then costs are reduced and the effort can be sustainable.

Principals and superintendents often lament the lack of common planning time, but quickly add that “there is no time in the day for teachers to meet and review data.” While this is a widely-held belief, it is not actually so in most cases. The reality is, it is hard to schedule teacher-planning time during the school day, but it is not impossible.

In the hands of a scheduling expert, nearly every school with a typical school day can create daily common planning/data team meetings, and time for all students to get at least one extra instructional period, all without adding staff or lengthening the school day. How? The details would fill a book, and the book would not likely be a sufficient guide. The key is to find a scheduling guru who does not require a guidebook.

Many schools have found internally or hired externally someone who is just great at scheduling. It is a rare skill, but in their hands, seemingly impossible to schedule blocks of time can be found.

Lower-cost options to avoid summer loss

Some districts solve the ELT puzzle by lengthening the school year, rather than the school day. Unlike most middle- and upper-class students who grow academically over the summer, most children living in poverty make no gains or fall further behind. The American Educational Research Association reports that lower-income students generally start the new year about where they had been the previous spring or even behind their spring levels of performance, while upper-income students improve over the summer months and begin the new school year ahead of where they had been the previous spring.⁴

Given these facts, a logical conclusion would be to provide summer school for students living in poverty. Like everything else in education, the quality of implementation is critical. Just providing extra time in the summer may not help students grow academically if the instruction is disconnected from the regular year’s content and if the students do not show up.

- **Know what is working and end or modify ineffective programs**

Not all summer programs are effective and cost-effective, but often districts do not know whether their summer programs are or are not. Some districts make a fairly significant investment in summer efforts. District-run programs can cost \$1,500 per student or more; outside providers often charge even more (Exhibit 2). To reduce costs, some districts offer short (one or two week) programs that run from \$350 to \$700 a student, but this may be too short to make a substantive impact on student learning.

Providing effective summertime instruction is difficult. Summer programs are thus top candidates for measuring cost-effectiveness and taking actions as a result. This includes measuring costs (per student who actually attends, not just listed as enrolled) and tracking achievement gains. Nothing is more costly than spending money on efforts that do not raise student

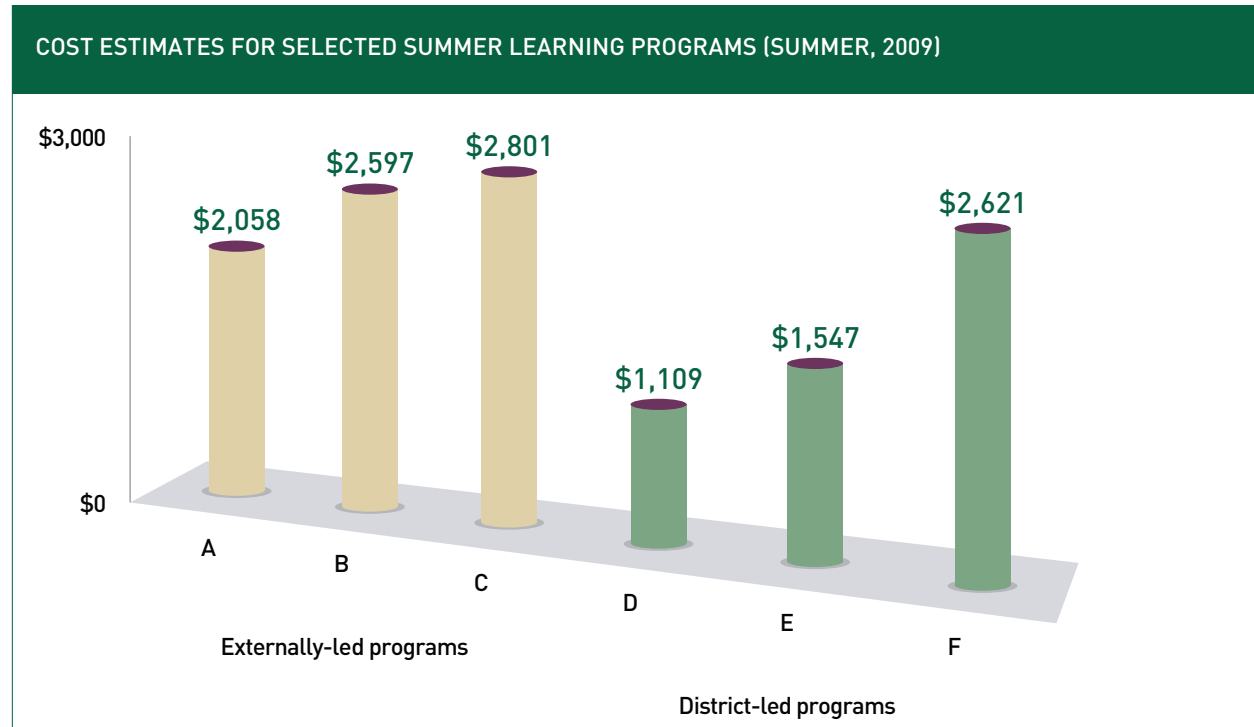
achievement. An ineffective summer program hurts students and the budget, and is a cost best cut or redesigned.

- **Stagger teacher vacations**

Some schools and districts have created longer school years for students while maintaining 180-day schedules for teachers (Exhibit 3). Brooklyn Generation School (NY), for example, supports a 200-day school year for students, but a 180-day schedule for teachers.

It is best to act as if money is tight, because it is likely to be tight in the near future.

Exhibit 2



Source: Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Catherine H. Augustine, Heather L. Schwartz, Susan J. Bodilly, Brian McInnis, Dahlia S. Lichter, and Amanda Brown Cross, "Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning," RAND Education, 2011.

Note: Providers A, B, and C are national non-profit organizations that operate in multiple cities in the U.S. and serve at least 1,000 students each. The district providers each operate a summer program within their given district on some but not all school campuses.

Exhibit 3

STAGGERED SCHOOL YEAR SAMPLE 9TH GRADE SCHEDULE

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Total
9th grade core teachers	In school	In school	Vacation	In school	In school	In school	Vacation	In school	In school	In school	In school	Vacation	9
Other 9th grade staff	In school	In school	In school	Vacation	In school	In school	In school	Vacation	In school	In school	In school	Vacation	9
9th grade students	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	In school	Vacation	11

Source: Adapted from "Staggered Schedules at Brooklyn Generation HS: Cost Saving Solution to Increased Learning Time", MASS2020, <http://www.mass2020.org/files/file/Increased%20Learning%20Time%20Partnership/Session%207/S7%20Resource%20-%20Brooklyn%20Generation%20Profile.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2013).

The trick is to stagger when some teachers take vacation. In different months, different teachers take vacations. By carefully mapping which teachers are off, creating one-month academic supports, and using a fairly complex schedule, students get eleven months of school and intensive academic support without larger

classes or more staff.

In this model, ninth grade core teachers have three, staggered, month-long vacations throughout the school year. During two of these month-long vacations, students take intensive courses with other ninth grade staff. These could include project-based

learning, outside internships, or college-career readiness courses that are staffed with either full-time, part-time, or paraprofessional staff depending upon the course. All teachers and students are off the month of August for vacation. In this way, students have an extended 220-day school year, while teachers maintain a regular 180-day schedule.

Use Stable Funding Sources

Regardless of which approach a district uses to extend learning time, many will require additional funds. Having a consistent, recurring funding source from the start can have a big impact on ELT's sustainability. Schools that used hefty SIG grants to pay all their staff for a longer day find themselves short on dollars when the grant ends, and teachers have come to believe a longer day deserves \$5,000-\$7,500 for everyone working in the school. It is hard to backtrack and cut pay for the same work.

Perhaps the most stable funding source is schoolwide Title I funds. Federal Title I funding has never decreased (excluding the ARRA bump). The amount of Title I funding a school or district receives can shift based on changes in enrollment and state distribution rules, but it is generally stable from year to year.

It is not uncommon for a high-poverty school to receive \$1,000 to \$1,500 per student from Title I. One district was able to add an hour a day to the school day by paying teachers more (about \$700 per pupil) and thus only tapped a portion of its Title I funds. If only some teachers are paid extra, two hours of extra time can be funded and dollars still remain for other uses.

Another option for sustainability is to shift ELT from an add-on to a baseline component of teacher compensation as part of large-scale compensation reforms. A few districts are experimenting with innovative contracts, often differentiating pay by performance, subject taught, or for teaching in high-needs schools. This is a significant deviation from traditional steps and lanes and seniority. Perhaps these groundbreaking collective bargaining agreements can also move away from the 6½-hour workday.

A Warning

Extending the school day will, most likely, require shifting funds from other current sources or finding other sustainable funding. The design of the plan, however, can significantly alter the costs of providing a longer school day or school year. Equally important is the need to ensure that the extra time leads to extra learning. Spending scarce funds on a longer school day or longer school year can be an important element of a school reform effort, but it can also be a fruitless investment if it does not result in significant gains in achievement.

Any strategy that raises building-based spending by 10-30% must meet a high performance hurdle. A 15% pay increase for all teachers in a typical 500-student elementary school could, for example, fund five reading teachers, two instructional coaches, and nearly two weeks of summer teacher-planning time for every classroom teacher.

ELT is a great candidate for Academic Return on Investment analysis. If not carefully implemented, more can become less. A common trade-off might be one extra hour with certified teachers or two extra hours with paraprofessionals and volunteers. If the use of the extra time is for enrichment, two might be better than one. If the time is devoted to core content, one extra hour with a skilled teacher will likely be more effective than two hours with non-teachers.

Some schools have reported that the extra time went to ineffective instruction with too many ineffective teachers. Others, in an effort to keep costs down, used lower-cost paraprofessionals to teach struggling students or recruited well-meaning volunteers or laymen to provide tutoring. These strategies seldom raise achievement. Teaching quality still remains the largest school-based factor in student achievement. Many high performing countries such as Korea and Finland have less instructional time than the traditional American school.⁵

Staying Focused on Outcomes

The fact that the school day and school calendar have not changed in more than a half century or more seems on the surface out-of-date. The schedule was originally designed to support a farming lifestyle, leaving time to work the fields and harvest the crops, which seems rather silly in today's knowledge economy. A longer school day or school year is a common-sense approach to meeting the greater needs of a student body asked to reach higher standards. As districts turn to this strategy, it is important to measure outcomes, build financial sustainability into the design from the start, and to be aggressive in stopping ineffective ELT efforts.

¹ Zakia Redd, Christopher Boccanduso, Karen Walker, Daniel Princiotta, Dylan Knewstub, and Kristin Moore, "Expanding Time for Learning both Inside and Outside the Classroom: A Review of the Evidence Base," The Wallace Foundation, August 2012, <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/summer-and-extended-learning-time/extended-learning-time/Documents/Expanding-Time%20for-Learning-Both-Inside-and-Outside-the-Classroom-Executive-Summary.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2013).

² Financing Expanded Learning Time in Schools: A Look at Five District Expanded-Time Schools, National Center on Time and Learning, January 2014, <http://www.timeandlearning.org/files/FinancingELTInSchools.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2014).

³ Marguerite Roza, and Karen Hawley Miles, "Taking Stock of the Fiscal Costs of Expanded Learning Time," Center for American Progress, July 2008, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2008/07/pdf/elt2.pdf> (accessed June 15, 2013).

⁴ Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda S. Olson, "Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective," *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 23, no.2 (2001): 171-191.

⁵ D.P. Baker, R. Fabrega, C. Galindo, and J. Mishook, "Instructional Time and National Achievement: Cross-National Evidence," *Prospects* Volume 34, issueXXXIV(2004):311-3343), 2004.

GETTING STARTED

LOWERING THE COST OF EXTENDED LEARNING TIME: Creating Financial Sustainability

Extended learning time (ELT) is a common sense solution to one of the great paradoxes facing public schools in the United States: the traditional school calendar has not changed in the last half century, even though the needs of students have increased considerably during this same period. As districts and schools experiment and pioneer ELT programs, a common obstacle they face is the often-high price of more time. However, a number of more cost-effective, affordable, and sustainable strategies are emerging.

HERE'S HOW TO GET STARTED:

- 1 PLAN FOR FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FROM DAY ONE**
Many ELT efforts were launched with new grant dollars, but had to be abandoned when grant funding ended. Planning for sustainability from the beginning by reducing staffing in the current operating budget or minimizing new costs can pay big dividends in the future.
- 2 ALIGN AND EMBED ELT IN YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN**
Integrating ELT with other reform strategies – with a focus on better instruction, not just more instruction – can increase the impact of the extra time.
- 3 DO NOT PAY FOR TIME THAT COULD BE HAD FOR FREE**
Another way to plan for financial sustainability is to lower the cost of ELT. Rather than add (and pay for) two hours of extra time, schools can begin by first trying to find an hour during the existing school day, and then adding only one hour to the day.
- 4 CONSIDER OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE SCHOOL TIME FOR STUDENTS, BUT NOT STAFF**
Another creative way to lower the cost of ELT is to increase the school time for students, but not for staff (or at least not for all staff). By staggering teacher start-times or vacation schedules, more student time can be had without increasing the amount of teacher time.
- 5 ENSURE TEACHER BUY-IN, BUT DO NOT OVER-PAY FOR IT**
Ensuring teacher enthusiasm and buy-in for ELT is critical, but many districts attempt to win support with large pay increases, which can't be sustained. Consider seeking active union participation from the beginning, making ELT voluntary, and involving teachers in the program design.

A word to the wise: **MONITOR CLOSELY**

Nearly all reform efforts can benefit from careful measurement of cost-effectiveness, but ELT is an especially strong candidate for academic return on investment (A-ROI) analysis. ELT is a big expense and can be worth it, but only if the extra instructional time is effective. Districts should monitor closely and conduct rigorous analysis to ensure that more time results in more student achievement.



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

LOWERING THE COST OF EXTENDED LEARNING TIME: Creating Financial Sustainability



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®

The length of the typical school day and year has not changed much since at least World War II, but the depth and breadth of what needs to be mastered by students certainly has. At the same time, many children come to school with greater needs and less support at home. More time in school seems to many a common sense step to helping more students become college and career ready.

Lessons from the field

LESSON
1

Make ELT *part of a comprehensive strategy, not the strategy*

LESSON
2

Provide an intensive block of targeted instructional time

LESSON
3

Teacher buy-in is a non-negotiable

LESSON
4

Modifying class size and teacher workload can help fund ELT in a sustainable way

LESSON
5

Measure student growth compared to a control group

A number of high-profile success stories, especially urban charter schools like KIPP and Green Dot, which have much longer school days and school years, have pushed extended learning time (ELT) onto the agenda of many urban districts. The relatively wide availability of grant funding from federal, state, and philanthropic sources has spurred adoption of ELT in a growing number of districts. This reliance on external funding has been a boon to kick-starting the effort, but can create challenges in the long run. As districts begin or expand ELT, they can gain insight from the emerging lessons of other districts on how best to increase the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of a longer school day and/or school year.

**LESSON
1****Make ELT *part of a comprehensive strategy, not the strategy***

To date, research on the effectiveness of ELT is based heavily on the success of high-performing charter schools such as KIPP and Green Dot.¹ These schools do have longer days and longer school years, but they also incorporate many other reform efforts during their additional hours. Few, if any, schools have raised student achievement solely through a longer, “more of the same” strategy.

In the cases where ELT has helped improve student outcomes, schools have used the new school calendar as a backdrop for redesigning teaching and learning, with a focus on better instruction, not just more instruction. Some districts redesigned instructional coaching and teacher training as part of their ELT plan. Other districts ensured that extra class time was provided by highly-effective teachers. For example, one district’s ELT plan called for extending school for struggling students during vacations; since teachers across the country were on vacation at that same time, the district had a huge pool of educators from which to staff their extra-time academies. Teachers from across the country applied specifically to teach these vacation sessions. They received compensation, recognition, training, and satisfaction; students received access to “all star” teachers. The same district took the idea of ensuring that the extra time for students was with great instructors by staffing their extra-help period of the longer school day with tutors from the high-performing charter school organization MATCH Education.

In both examples, the district strategy explicitly linked ELT with ensuring highly-effective instruction. The results were impressive. In schools with MATCH tutors, focusing exclusively on high school math, proficiency rates on the state test rose from 41% to 63% in their first year. The student growth increase was even more significant, moving from the 23rd percentile statewide to 75th, the largest gain in the state in any subject or grade during the four years that student growth has been measured. Strong results were also seen from the intensive vacation “acceleration academies” staffed with highly-effective teachers from across the country. Students who attended this ELT grew by 10 growth percentile points more than non-attendees in ELA and by 14 growth percentile points in math.

Extra time for teachers can be as important as extra time for students. Some schools use much of the extra time for teachers to plan together, to learn from instructional coaches, to review data, or meet with their principals. Schools have, through ELT, moved from less than an hour a week of teacher support and planning to a full day a week. Clever scheduling also provides extra time for students, but a core element of the plan was dramatically more time for teachers to improve their craft.

**LESSON
2****Provide an intensive block of targeted instructional time**

Providing extra time for students can take many forms, with the most common including full-day kindergarten, longer school day, or longer school year. While the data is still emerging, many successful ELT models include intensive, targeted instructional support. This is a large block of time dedicated to addressing student-specific skill and content gaps. This can take the form of vacation boot camps, intensive summer instruction, a two-hour block each day, or even one full day each week of targeted instruction. This targeted instruction is guided by detailed student-specific data pinpointing specific student needs and learning gaps: one student may need help with fractions, another may be struggling with the concept of place value, and a third may have a misunderstanding of decimals.

These intensive blocks of targeted instructional time stand in sharp contrast to the “more of the regular school day” approach. This can include simply having longer periods of core instruction, such as moving from 45-minute periods to 60-minute periods, or providing two periods of Algebra I. In each of these cases, the extra instruction is directed at the whole class and dictated by the current year’s curriculum, rather than targeting student-specific learning gaps. The other less-than-effective, but somewhat common approach is using the extra time as homework help, which, again, is not tailored to focus on individual students’ needs. Another form of “more of the same” can be extending kindergarten to full day, but leaving the rest of elementary school unchanged in terms of time, instructional practices, teacher quality, etc. In many districts, the gains from the longer kindergarten day are quickly dissipated as students advance to higher grades.

**LESSON
3****Teacher buy-in is a non-negotiable**

Just as the proverbial glass can be half-empty and half-full at the same time depending on your mindset, ELT can be viewed as a reward or a punishment by teachers. Since teacher effectiveness has a far greater impact on student learning than time-on-task, ensuring strong teacher commitment is critical to ensuring that ELT will, in fact, help students achieve at higher levels.

As a cautionary note, it should be recognized that the majority of ELT success stories such as high-performing charter schools started from Day One with a long school day and/or school year. This means all the teachers applied to work the longer hours and greater number of days. This is very different from most urban schools that adopt ELT, where the longer day

is a significant change in working conditions from what they first signed up for. At one school that adopted a longer school day after being named a failing school by the state, the staff openly referred to ELT as punishment for low test scores. It should be no surprise that ELT failed to raise achievement at this school.

Some districts flush with grant funds have tried to buy teacher commitment with hefty pay increases. In the short run, this can create some excitement from teachers, but unfortunately, this creates unsustainable expectations when the grant ends. Once the grant ends, working longer hours and extra days can feel like unpaid servitude and has generated much discord from some teachers.

Districts that have staff who embrace and value ELT have used a number of means to gain teacher buy-in. Some districts engaged union officials very early in the planning stage. This has been helpful in addressing seemingly small issues that can create much friction, such as provisions for childcare, adjustments to prep time, wages, and whether some or all staff will have longer hours.

Active union participation has smoothed the way and generated strong support, but it has sometimes created the least financially-sustainable plans. Two of the most costly provisions that have helped create staff acceptance are proportional pay, i.e. 25% more pay for 25% more time, and 100% of staff working the longer hours such as guidance counselors, art teachers and other elective teachers, clerical staff, etc. Both of these concepts fit neatly in the constructs of many union contracts, but they add much expense and can threaten long-term sustainability. Options like 10% pay for 20% longer school day and only having targeted staff stay longer are not instant winners with some teachers. Taking the time, early on, to explain the financial constraints and developing shared understanding of the trade-offs can help reduce friction.

Teacher choice can also be a very effective (and cost-effective) means of winning teacher support. Some districts, for example, make the longer school day or school year completely voluntary for existing staff. The pay and workday expectations are shared, and staff can opt in or ask to be transferred to a school with a traditional schedule. This allows teachers who think it is unfair or who have personal conflicts to avoid being forced into an unwanted situation. New hires to the school obviously join knowing what they are signing up for. Other forms of teacher choice can include allowing them to select early or late start times in a staggered work schedule or selecting which vacation periods to work in a boot camp model.

Engaging the union in helping craft the dimensions of teacher choice, rather than teacher compensation, can be a cost-effective way of engaging teachers and their representatives while helping ensure that staff who do not want to be part of ELT are not forced to. Obviously, each district's collective

bargaining agreements and state laws will greatly influence if these options are even possible.

LESSON 4

Modifying class size and teacher workload can help fund ELT in a sustainable way

ELT can be expensive, and while grants can provide a short-term bridge, modifying class size and teacher workload has been a path to sustainable funding in some districts. Few other strategies can free up such significant funds. Just as ELT should be part of a comprehensive teaching and learning strategy, some districts have also made it part of a comprehensive financial strategy as well.

On the simplest level, raising class size by 10% can reduce teaching costs by 10%, which in turn, has funded an extra one to two hours a day of instructional time in some districts. This is consistent with a theory of action that values time-on-task or teacher planning time, rather than small classes. Districts with a strategy that prioritizes increased teacher effectiveness as well as more student learning time have increased class size to fund extensive coaching positions while using grant dollars to fund the longer school day or year. This approach helps ensure the extra time leads to extra learning.

Reducing the teaching load during the “regular” school day can also allow a longer school day without a hefty premium. Districts have paid as little as 10% extra or as much as 30% extra for a longer school day, which is a sizable swing. By substituting blended learning or online courses during the “regular” day, staff in some schools have accepted less of a premium for the “extra” time, because less was asked of them during their regular school day.

Finally, some districts revamped the role of some classroom teachers to take on building management or instructional coaching roles normally filled by administrators or full-time coaches. Teachers applied for these dual positions in exchange for a stipend and career growth. This empowered teachers, reduced some full-time support positions, and thus freed up funds for ELT.

All of these strategies have one common theme - reducing the number of staff needed in a school in order to free up funds for extended learning time. In nearly all cases, it has been easier to make these changes from Day One, rather than when ELT startup funds run dry.

LESSON
5**Measure student growth compared to a control group**

It is easy to know if a district has implemented extended learning time by simply looking at the official school calendar and schedule, but it is much more difficult to know if it has been implemented effectively. Nearly all reform efforts can benefit from careful measurement of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, but ELT is an especially strong candidate for three reasons:

1. ELT is often a very large expense
2. ELT effectiveness and cost-effectiveness is relatively easy to measure
3. ELT has been ineffective in raising achievement in many schools

Since the research base is thin, and in many ways, disappointing, it is especially important that districts know if this often-large expenditure is improving student outcomes. The need is amplified because ELT is almost always just one component of a multi-pronged reform effort, and often the most costly component.

In order to determine if ELT is effective, and thus an investment worth continuing, districts need to focus on measurable gains rather than extra minutes. This includes ensuring that baseline data is available, building a system for measuring student growth, and designating a control group. The control group is key to teasing out if the extra time is leading to extra learning.

There are two approaches to establishing a control, either within a school or across schools. The first works best when not all students receive extra time. Intensive vacation week or summer programs fit this mold. One district that used this form of ELT conducted two types of analyses. First they assessed specific skills at the start and end of the extra time to assess what, if any, new skills were mastered, and by how many students. They also compared year over year growth compared to the students who did not participate in these extra weeks of instruction.

Another way to measure the impact of ELT within a school is to compare results from the school prior to the extra time. Sadly, a number of schools have experienced an actual decline in scores in ELT schools, a clear sign that the effort is not bearing fruit, despite the added expense. Even rising test scores is not adequate proof of the effectiveness of ELT. While some schools add extra time due to chronic low performance, some schools with dynamic principals and strong track records add ELT to their list of reforms. Some of these schools have pointed with pride to rising scores during the period of ELT, but a look back showed that scores had been rising at the same rate prior to the additional time and additional expense.

Cross-school comparisons require the most sophisticated analysis, since the schools must have very similar structures other than ELT, and school-wide results must be adjusted for any differences in student demographics. Given the often-hefty expense, any rollout of ELT should incorporate from the outset a robust means to gauge its effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

Trust, but verify

Extended learning time is an increasingly common component of school turnaround efforts, backed by both common sense and some striking success stories. Too often, however, districts have assumed ELT must be helpful, but have not created the context for staff buy-in, long-term financial sustainability, or actionable accountability measures. Approaching ELT with a healthy skepticism can be a powerful approach to ensuring success.

SPENDING MONEY WISELY

Getting the Most from School District Budgets

This chapter is from *Spending Money Wisely: Getting the Most from School District Budgets* by Nathan Levenson, Karla Baehr, James C. Smith, and Claire Sullivan of The District Management Council. To access this chapter and the rest of the series, please go to www.dmcouncil.org. Topics in this series include:

1. **Calculating Academic Return on Investment: A Powerful Tool and a Great Investment**
2. **Managing to Existing Class-Size Targets: Systems and Tools to Staff More Closely to Current Policy**
3. **Adding Precision to Remediation and Intervention Staffing Levels: Data-Driven Guidelines Improve Schedules, Building Assignments, and Workload**
4. **Finding Politically Acceptable Ways to Increase Class Size or Teaching Load: Freeing up Funds for Strategic Priorities**
5. **Strategically Spending Federal Entitlement Grants: Making the Connection to District Priorities**
6. **Ensuring More Students Read on Grade Level: Cost-Effective Strategies**
7. **Improving the Cost-Effectiveness of Professional Development: Reducing Expenses While Increasing Impact**
8. **Rethinking Purchasing: A Strategic Approach to Increasing the Value of Each Dollar Spent**
9. **Lowering the Cost of Extended Learning Time: Creating Financial Sustainability**
10. **Targeting New Investments: Funding a Better Future Despite Declining Resources**

About the Authors

Nathan Levenson is Senior Managing Director of The District Management Council (DMC). After a career in the private sector and six years as an elected school board member, he served as superintendent in Arlington, Massachusetts. His work at DMC has led him to more than 50 districts, always looking to help them do more with less.

James C. Smith, Senior Director at The District Management Council, has a combination of human capital consulting and classroom teaching experience. James works on projects across several areas including human capital, strategic planning, special education, and stakeholder engagement.

Karla Baehr is Senior Advisor and Consultant at The District Management Council. Her many years of experience as a superintendent in both urban and affluent districts provide a unique perspective. Karla also served as deputy commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Claire Sullivan is a Senior Associate at The District Management Council. Having worked in the classroom prior to joining DMC, Claire now works with a number of districts on mapping resource allocation, with particular focus on data-driven budgeting and improving special education and remediation and intervention staffing.

About the District Management Council

The District Management Council (DMC) partners with public school district leaders to help improve student outcomes, operational efficiency, and resource allocation. DMC was founded in 2004 to address the most pressing and important management challenges facing American educators. The trusted advisor to school district leaders, DMC works with districts on these important issues to achieve measurable results. With the firm belief that leadership and management matter, DMC helps to strengthen and increase the managerial capacity of the people leading school districts to systemically improve the performance of the American public education system. To learn more, visit www.dmcouncil.org.

Support for this series was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL®