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INTRODUCTION

As is true in much of American society, the benefits of our public education system are stratified strongly along racial and socioeconomic lines. Closing the gap is both a moral and economic imperative. Research shows that extended learning time can make a real difference in our ability to do so.

Indeed, extended time is an essential practice that is no longer optional if we are to make our education system more equitable.

This brief, which summarizes a longer research report, draws the connection between the achievement gap and extended time strategies. It also provides information on successful models of extended time and important considerations that can help assure that local investments reap the intended benefits.

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP – IT'S A MATTER OF TIME

Education should be the great equalizer, but that is beyond reach unless schools are able to provide more learning time to high-need students.

Data from multiple sources—including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), and the Common Core of Data—tell the same story. Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, who are also more likely to be African American and Hispanic, achieve substantially and consistently less than their higher-income counterparts, who are also more likely to be white and Asian. That's across a wide breadth of measures, including test scores, high school and college graduation rates, and career earnings.

The learning gap starts before students enter kindergarten and is exacerbated by huge differences in the learning opportunities lower income students have outside of the regular school day and year. Research shows that one big variable is time spent learning. The After-School Corporation estimates that students from the bottom quintile economically receive:

- 220 fewer hours being read to by family members;

- 1,395 hours not spent in pre-kindergarten;

- 3,060 fewer hours in after-school and extracurricular activities in elementary school;

- 1,080 fewer hours in camp and other summer programs; and

- 245 fewer hours visiting zoos, museums and the like.

Over the thirteen years of K-12 education that adds up to 6,000 hours or 4.75 school years. When we look at this issue from the perspective of time spent learning it is no wonder that the achievement gap is so persistent.

Increasing access to early education and changing how young people spend their time outside of school are among the most promising strategies for addressing the achievement gap.

"Families who can afford to purchase classes, sports and camps for their children do so as a matter of course. They know that exposure, skills, experiences are essential for their children's development and future. Over the last 40 years, upper-income parents have increased the amount they have spent on their children's enrichment activities like tutoring and extracurriclars, by ten times the amount their lower-income peers have been able to invest."

Brackenridge et al. "Expanding Learning: A Powerful Strategy for Equity."
Policy Analysis for California Education, 2017.

SCHOOLS HAVE THREE BASIC OPTIONS FOR EXTENDING LEARNING TIME

Within school settings, extended time has three dimensions, all of which can be targeted at high-need students:

- Lengthening the school day by making regular school longer, adding enrichment activities before and after school, or doing both;

- Lengthening the school year, which typically involves summer programs; and

- Lengthening the "school career" by improving access and participation in preschool opportunities for under-represented groups and perhaps also offering a fifth year of free public high school to students who need it.

Targeting extra learning opportunities to specifically address the achievement gap makes extended time affordable. However, a "brute force" method of just increasing time will not be effective. School administrators, educators and community members need to be meticulous in their implementation of extended time in order to close the achievement gap.

Research and experience show that extended learning programs that make a difference in student success generally align student needs, school/district realities, and community assets and issues. A myriad of different models have been implemented throughout the United States, with somewhat mixed results. What follows is a brief sampling of those models.

Extending the School Year: Elevate [Math] Uses Summer to Accelerate Students' Learning and Support Teacher Learning

The Silicon Valley Education Foundation's Elevate [Math] program combines a 75-hour, 19-day intensive summer math program with three days of teacher professional development, including in-class coaching and professional learning group opportunities. This program focuses on middle school students in order to impact the achievement gap before students get to high school. It provides the equivalent of an additional half year of math instruction and targets students who need the extra time. A study by WestEd found that this model demonstrated significant positive results in math attainment for the students who participated.

Extending the School Day: Massachusetts Provides Funds and Flexibility to Support Local Approaches

The state of Massachusetts annually provides funds to schools that want to expand time spent in school, allowing districts to use the funds to:

- Provide more instructional time in core subjects,

- Integrate enrichment and applied learning opportunities into the school day, and

- Give teachers time for planning, analysis, lesson design and professional development.

Culmette Elementary District provides just one example of how local schools in the state configured successful programs. One school rethought the school day and week by adding seven hours a week to its schedule, lengthening the time spent in each class period and adding periods. Students now attended school from 7:30 a.m. to 3:35 p.m. One added period was a learning lab where underperforming students participated in small group tutoring while high-performing students had other learning opportunities. On Fridays, a local community organization offered recreational activities on-site for all students while teachers used the time for collaboration and professional development. The resulting gains in student performance were dramatic.

Longer School Careers: Preventing Achievement Gaps or Making Up for Them

Extensive research shows that low-income children enter kindergarten already behind their higher income peers, and that the same children are substantially less likely to participate in high quality early education programs before they enter kindergarten. In addition, the National Educators Association "recognizes that full-day kindergarten programs close the achievement gaps between young children from minority and low-income families and their peers." Given the evidence, it makes sense to invest in pre-kindergarten programs for these students.

California is also in the midst of policy discussions about ways to incentivize districts to provide an additional year of high school for students who do not graduate on time. That includes adding to the state's public accountability reporting a five-year graduation rate, allowing schools to demonstrate their success with students who may need additional time to earn a regular high school diploma (e.g., students with disabilities and English learners).

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MAKING EXTENDED TIME WORK REQUIRES COLLABORATION, PLANNING, AND INVESTMENT

Implementing extended time programs that truly address the achievement gap requires that school and community leaders plan carefully. Creating programs that work starts with careful consideration of local goals, context and needs.

Considerations Related to Local Goals, Program Design and Partnerships

When contemplating how to use extended time, the central consideration should be how the program will support and align with district learning goals. Having a clear strategy and objective will help shape a program that gets results. Research shows that successful programs, whatever their shape, are planned with some critical issued addressed, including:

- The extent to which the program provides enrichment opportunities and active learning that complements but does not duplicate regular classroom instruction.
- A clear plan for identifying staff qualified to deliver the program and excited to participate, including the possibility of using the program as a professional development opportunity.
- Identification of community partners that would support the program and could bring assets—be they resources, knowledge or staff—that the school lacks.
- Opportunities within the program design to provide some intensive support for student learning (such as high-dosage tutoring).

Considerations Related to School and District Context

Extended time programs, targeted to high-need and under-achieving students often and early in their school careers, can be one of the most efficient investments that schools can make. That said, these programs do require additional funding, whether that is creative usage of existing funding streams (such as federal meal programs) or identifying outside sources.

Professional development is an important element in maximizing the value of extended time. The most effective strategies include professional learning communities and collaborative lesson planning as part of extended time programs.

On the other hand, teacher burnout is a reality that can prompt staff resistance to extended time proposals. It needs to be recognized and addressed. Policymakers and administrators need to coordinate closely with school faculty and staff, and their respective unions to find the right combination of incentives, both financial and professional. Supplementing staff with tutors can reduce costs and also can have the extra benefit of acting as a recruitment opportunity for prospective teachers.

Considerations Related to What Families and Students Want

Public support for extended time programs is heavily variable based on the form the programs take. Surveys have shown both positive and negative opinions, which have also played out in terms of program participation.

For example, some voluntary extended time programs have had disappointing family response, with nearly 50% of eligible low-SES students not enrolling. One aspect of this involves the students themselves. Schools have found that it is essential to work with students and families to determine what sort of after-school and summer enrichment programs the school should offer.

Extended time programs offer opportunities to strengthen parent involvement and community support. Examples include using extended time to discuss student progress with parents and show them ways to supplement learning at home. Opportunities for students to participate in service learning can also bolster student engagement and strengthen school-community ties.

CONSIDERING THE OPTIONS FOR EXTENDED TIME IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

The achievement gap appears early and it persists. Without targeted extended time, schools will not be able to help struggling students catch up. It's time to start local discussions and learn more about what is happening elsewhere. Sufficient research and experience now exist to provide myriad examples of what can work and how to implement successful programs. Key resources for learning more are provided in the box on this page.

School communities that do not explore the options for this important intervention are limiting the options and futures of the students they serve.

RESOURCES

- **Full Report**

  www.svefoundation.org/resources

- **The Region 5 Expanded Learning Partnerships** provides a wealth of resources for any school or community group interested in afterschool and summer programs

  www.region5afterschool.org

- **First 5 Santa Clara** supports a variety of programs and provides some of the research on the importance of early learning

  www.first5kids.org/guiding-research

- **The National Center on Time and Learning** offers a wealth of research and resources

  www.timeandlearning.org

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