Eight Powerful Practices of Successful, Expanded-Time Schools
The Role of Time

The educators at the schools profiled in this study believe that more time is fundamental to providing a high-quality, rigorous, and well-rounded education that prepares students for success. More time allows schools to offer a challenging academic program, while still providing individualized academic supports that address the specific skill and knowledge gaps that can impede students’ progress. With more time, schools can engage teachers in the significant work of analyzing student data, strategizing on common instructional practices, and honing their skills in the classroom. More time also allows schools to focus not just on the “tested subjects” of English and math, but also to provide a deep and engaging education in the sciences, humanities, social studies, and the arts. More time affords opportunities to expose students to the world outside their schools and communities, to build new skills and interests that they will pursue throughout their lives, and to offer activities that build a strong school culture—one that values and supports learning. Finally, more time allows schools, particularly high schools, to effectively prepare students who may be the first in their families to attend college, for future academic and professional success.

It should be noted that schools do not necessarily have to offer more time to implement any one of the eight practices described in this report. Past studies of high-performing schools that don’t offer more time often have pointed to some of these very same practices as crucial reasons schools succeed. Further, more time is not the only reform needed for struggling schools; expanded time acts as a catalyst, or accelerator, to a series of other reforms as well. Indeed, it is this interaction of more time with other sound practices that leads to meaningful impact. Through NCTL’s considerable experience on the ground, along with our observations for this study and other research, we have developed a four-factor model for effective school improvement involving expanded learning time. In this model, the power of time is synergized by productive investments in human capital—involving the development of outstanding leaders and teachers, the effective application of data, and the formation of a constructive school culture focused on high expectations and mutual accountability. Together, these four factors become vital, interactive companions in each successful school improvement. Time reform, people, data, and culture, in other words, comprise four interlocking gears for improving schools.

As depicted in the figure below, expanding learning time can have a mutually catalyzing and supporting effect with the three other reform gears. In this diagram, the gear labeled People refers to a wide range of efforts to develop or hire talented school leaders and highly effective teachers. While not all people reforms require additional time, schools in this study demonstrate how their work to improve teacher effectiveness relies on additional time for teachers.

Four Interlocking Gears of Successful, Expanded-Time Schools

- **Time to coach and develop teachers and continuously strengthen instruction**
- **Time to teach and reinforce high expectations for behavior and achievement**
- **Time for teachers to assess student understanding and analyze and respond to data**
- **Time for a rigorous and well-rounded education that prepares students for success in college and careers**
The corollary is that strong teachers and leaders use time well—that is, the two gears work together. The gear labeled Data refers to the many facets of improving the collection and use of data in schools. While developing excellent data systems does not require an expanded school schedule, to make full use of these systems, schools do need more time to conduct assessments, analyze, and respond to data. Again, reciprocally, the deft use of this data renders learning time more effective, because it guides investing instructional time exactly where individual students need it most. Finally, to establish a positive school Culture, schools do not necessarily need to expand learning time, but additional time can allow schools to offer a range of activities that build school spirit, teach shared values, and set and reinforce high expectations for behavior and achievement. This positive school culture also helps turn the gears by making the time for learning more productive.

All four gears in this diagram are fundamental to successful school reform. While the gear of Time helps turn the other three gears, in the absence of the others, this gear will spin unproductively. In that event, more time will have only limited impact on student learning.

The teachers and administrators at the schools profiled in this study will explain that while time alone is not enough, they believe more time, well spent, is an absolutely essential factor in the success of their school. The purpose of this report is to delve more deeply into what it means to use time well, drawing on some of the nation’s most successful schools as laboratories for learning.
Eight Powerful Practices of Successful, Expanded-Time Schools

None of the eight practices described in this report are new ideas. Topics such as using data to drive instruction, building a positive school culture, and preparing students for college and career success are recurring themes among education leaders, reformers, researchers, and policymakers. What this study is among the first to explore is the unique, empowering relationship between expanded time and some of these significant school improvement strategies.

The eight practices highlighted in this report, which attempt to unpack this relationship, can be grouped into three categories. The first three practices describe a fundamental approach to optimizing time for student learning that seems foundational to these schools’ success. High-performing, expanded-time schools consider time a precious resource; hence, they disburse it sparingly and invest it carefully, based on focused learning goals and individual student needs.

The second category of practices includes our observations about how these effective schools use time to support student success more broadly than just by offering intense and rigorous academic instruction. Practices four through six describe how schools in this study use time to broaden educational opportunities for students and provide an educational experience and school climate that help students thrive in school and beyond. While most of the schools expand time for core academic instruction, and these academic classes take precedence in student schedules, the expanded day or year also affords schools the opportunity to invest in additional types of learning and student development.

The third set of practices describes how high-performing, expanded-time schools dedicate time for teachers to improve their teaching. Policymakers and education leaders who advocate for expanded learning time are often most focused on the need for additional time for students and often overlook the value of an expanded schedule for teachers’ development. Practices seven and eight describe how high-performing, expanded-time schools in this study use an expanded school schedule to improve teacher effectiveness.

I. OPTIMIZING TIME FOR STUDENT LEARNING

High-Performing, Expanded-Time Schools:

1. Make Every Minute Count

Administrators and teachers at these high-performing schools are single-minded in their commitment to maximizing and optimizing learning time for both students and teachers.