

A State Policymaker's Guide to Expanding Learning Time

The Education Commission of the States

The National Center on Time & Learning

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THE TIME AND LEARNING CONNECTION

Several decades of research have suggested a meaningful relationship between time and learning, where the amount of time students spend engaged in learning is strongly associated with their level of achievement.¹ Among schools that have expanded the day and/or year, researchers have found that such a strategy can be quite effective, especially with at-risk students.²

REDUCED REVENUES DRIVE REDUCTIONS IN SCHOOL TIME

While President Obama has [declared](#) that “the challenges of a new century demand more time in the classroom,” some states are finding it necessary to consider *reducing* time in school to save money.

California 2009 [A.B. 2](#) allowed a school district, county office of education or charter school to shorten the instructional year by up to five school days in the 2009–10 through 2012–13 fiscal years (now extended through 2014–15 with the passage of 2011 [S.B. 70](#)) without incurring the penalties such an action would normally trigger.

Arizona 2010 [H.B. 2725](#) reduced the amount of time students in grades 7 and 8 must be enrolled in an instructional program from 1,068 hours to 1,000 hours (the equivalent of ten school days) beginning in FY 2010–11.

Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina: In 2010, legislators in [Alabama](#), [Mississippi](#) and [South Carolina](#) floated proposals to reduce the school year by as many as 10 days.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Two years ago, **Hawaii** enacted the nation's most dramatic cut in instructional days when the state legislature reduced funding to a level that would support only a 163-day school year. This striking move resulted in significant backlash from the public, and legislators [acted](#) in 2010 to restore funding to support the instructional days that would have otherwise been lost in the 2010–2011 school year. The source for that funding was a withdrawal of \$67 million (or as much as necessary) from the Hawaii hurricane relief fund. Additionally, enacted 2010 [legislation](#) not only restores funding to support the minimum 180 days of instruction, but also directs the Hawaii Department of Education, with the board of education and the governor's office, to submit to the legislature a plan to increase the instructional calendar to 190 days (including 1,140 instructional hours). The state's continued fiscal struggles have [prompted](#) the legislature to delay implementation of the expanded year strategy, though it remains a concrete goal.

WHAT SHOULD STATES BE DOING?

Generally speaking, state policymakers should consider the following guidelines in developing policies related to instructional time.

- **Time must vary with the needs of students** – Policymakers must consider that different populations need different amounts of time to achieve proficiency and that this variation must be factored into the education system.
- **Highlight what works** – Understanding how current expanded-time schools have leveraged the power of time—and done so in cost-effective ways—can help lead others to try, as well.
- **Incentivize innovation** – Policymakers can grant schools and educators flexibility to innovate, all while holding them accountable for demonstrating that their students are able to achieve at high levels or are improving significantly.

Within this broad framework, the following represent a variety of potential approaches to increasing instructional time.

Make competitive grants available

Massachusetts is expanding school time through a competitive grant program. The Expanded Learning Time (ELT) [Initiative](#) has districts apply on behalf of schools seeking to add 300 hours to the year (about 1 hour and 40 minutes per day in a 180-day school year). Active since 2005, the ELT Initiative now supports 19 schools across 9 districts, reaching a total of about 10,500 students.

Move from requiring annual average hours for all students to specific grade-span requirements targeting more time for certain grades

Washington 2009 [H.B. 2261](#) transitions the instructional year from a district-wide annual average of 1,000 hours to a minimum 1,080 instructional hours for students in grades 7–12 and a minimum 1,000 instructional hours for students in grades 1–6. For kindergartners, the instructional year will increase from a minimum of 450 instructional hours to at least 1,000 instructional hours. The state has funded this phase-in of full-day kindergarten over the last two years, starting with the highest-poverty schools, with full implementation coming in the 2017-18 school year.

Promote innovative use of time in greatest-need schools

Maryland 2010 [H.B. 439](#) directs the state board to explore using innovative scheduling models in low-performing and at-risk schools, including extended-year, year-round or other models that do not allow for prolonged lapses in instructional time. The state board is required to encourage county boards to use the school scheduling models most effective at improving achievement in low-performing or at-risk schools.

Build broad support and a robust policy framework by gathering input from business, community and higher education

Colorado's [Expanded Learning Opportunities Commission](#) is “to create a vision for student learning that incorporates a blend of traditional and online learning, expands the school day and standard yearly calendar and re-thinks the traditional school experience ... through collaboration and partnership with community-based organizations, the business community and higher education.” In 2010, the commission conducted a statewide listening tour to gather ideas for improving programs and enhancing school/community partnerships, and will release a final report in summer 2011.

North Carolina 2011 [H.B. 765](#), just signed by the governor in June 2011, creates a Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Current Length of the School Year. The commission, whose members represent legislative, educator and parent stakeholders, is tasked with reviewing various issues connected to the

current school year—including summer learning loss, the achievement gap, and postsecondary remediation rates. The commission must issue its interim findings to the 2012 legislative session, and its final findings and recommendations to the 2013 General Assembly.

MANAGING EFFORTS DURING DIFFICULT FINANCIAL TIMES

Expanded time can require additional resources to implement fully, but there are also approaches schools can take to expand time that are of little cost or cost neutral. States should support policies that encourage innovative approaches to staffing and budgeting at the school level. Forty states now enable the establishment of charter schools and some states, including Massachusetts and Colorado, have developed policies that enable new school-level autonomies. Examples of cost-effective models that expand time include:

- *Staggered staff schedules* – arranging for multiple shifts of teachers to cover a longer day and/or year without increasing the total teaching staff;
- *Technology as a teaching tool* – integrating technology to track students’ progress, but requiring fewer staff to guide learning; and
- *Partnerships* – building connections to community-based organizations, higher education institutions or businesses can act to enhance the educational program, while partners often bring their own resources to support students.

Because of revenue reductions, many districts simply have to make further cuts and often believe they have few options left except for reducing the number of school days if they are to maintain class sizes at their current levels. Using the assumption that the largest cost savings for either of these changes would be a reduction in teaching costs, ECS has estimated that a small increase in class sizes (from 25 to 26) could result in greater cost savings than a five day decrease in the length of the school year. These estimates are based on a 500-student school that pays their teachers an average salary of \$54,319 – the national average.

	180 School Days Avg. Class Size of 25	175 School Days Avg. Class Size of 25	180 School Days Avg. Class Size of 26
Number of Students	500	500	500
Average Class Size	25	25	26
Average Teacher Salaries*	\$54,319	\$54,319	\$54,319
Number of Days	180	175	180
Total Teaching Costs	\$1,357,975	\$1,320,253	\$1,305,745
Total Savings		\$37,722	\$52,230
Percentage Savings		2.8%	3.8%

* Average teacher salaries for FY 2008-09 - NEA Rankings & Estimates 2010.

CONCLUSION

As states and districts continue to face enormous financial pressures, on the one hand, and significant educational ones, on the other, learning time can be caught in the middle. Yet, our national long-term future is dependent on all students achieving at high levels. As the National Time and Learning [Commission](#) declared many years ago, “Holding all students to the same high standards means that some students will need more time.... Standards are then not a barrier to success but a mark of accomplishment. Used wisely and well, time can be the academic equalizer.”

For further information on this issue, please reference the full-length report, *Learning Time in America: Trends to Reform the American School Calendar* at <http://www.timeandlearning.org/images/lta.pdf>.

This guide was a joint project between the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL). If you have questions or comments about this paper, please contact Jennifer Dounay Zinth at ECS (jdounay@ecs.org) or David Farbman at NCTL (david@timeandlearning.org).

¹ Charles Fisher and David Berliner, *Teaching and learning in the elementary school: A summary of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study* (San Francisco, CA: Far West Lab for Educational Research and Development, 1978); R.A. Rossmiller, *Resource Utilization in Schools and Classrooms: Final Report (Program Report 86-7)* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 1986); and Maribeth Gettinger, "Time Allocated and Time Spent Relative to Time Needed for Learning as Determinants of Achievement," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77(1) 1985, pp. 3-11.

² Erika A. Patall, Harris Cooper and Ashley Batts Allen, "Extending the School Day or the School Year: A Systematic Review of Research (1985-2009)," *Review of Educational Research*, September 2010, Vol. 80, No. 3, pp. 401–436.

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