

Expanding Learning Time

How the Edwards Middle School in Boston partnered with Citizen Schools to transform the learning day

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This paper explores the promise of Expanded Learning Time (ELT) reforms through a case study of the Edwards Middle School in Boston and its partnership with the after-school provider Citizen Schools. This struggling urban middle school partnered with staff from Citizen Schools and other outside organizations to provide students with large blocks of focused math support and hands-on electives during the additional time. This “partner-dependent model” resulted in promising academic gains after the first year of implementation.

Expanded Learning Time and the Massachusetts pilot

EXPANDING LEARNING TIME in schools, particularly for students from low-income communities, is gaining currency in the education reform movement. Senator Edward Kennedy and Congressman George Miller, the committee leaders in charge of reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), are both promoting large demonstration programs to expand learning time as part of their reauthorization designs. Bill and Melinda Gates and Eli Broad have identified more learning time as one of three top priorities.

Massachusetts, which piloted ELT in ten schools in 2006–07, is on the leading edge of this movement. The non-profit organization *Massachusetts 2020*, a leader in after-school education, was a driving force behind the legislature’s approval of an ELT pilot program in 2006. During the first year of the program, ten participating schools across the state were given the opportunity to expand their hours by 30 percent or more for all students in exchange for an additional \$1,300 per student in state funding.

The Edwards model: partner-dependent ELT

The **Edwards Middle School** in Boston joined the first cohort of ELT pilot schools, implementing ELT in fall 2006. In launching ELT, Principal Mike Sabin and his staff built on several years of reform attempts by retaining and strengthening their emphasis on teacher teaming, mathematics, the arts, small class size, alignment with state standards, student choice, and simplicity. Finding

that many school-day teachers would not choose to work the extended hours, Sabin brought outside providers into the planning process early. *Citizen Schools*, which had previously served the school through a voluntary after-school program, was asked to work with the entire 6th grade class during the additional time. For the Edwards, this partnership meant that a trusted program would take full responsibility for this group of students during the added time; it also meant the opportunity to leverage the Citizen Schools program with those students in future years. For Citizen Schools, the partnership brought questions about adapting its model to the new regime of ELT, but it also brought freedom from the pressure of recruiting students and greater integration with school staff and culture.

As adopted by the Edwards, ELT increased learning time by 31 percent. Where students had previously been dismissed at 1:30pm every day, they now remained until 4:30pm. Monday through Thursday and were released at 11:40am on Fridays while staff participated in planning and professional development. During the added time, all students spent an hour in Math League, with teams of 10–15 students working together to learn and practice math concepts to make math engaging and social. Following Math League, 6th graders participated in other elements of the Citizen Schools program, including “apprenticeships”, hands-on learning experiences taught by volunteer “Citizen Teachers” in which weekly sessions over a semester culminate in a “WOW! event,” where students demonstrate their new skills. Seventh and eighth graders participated in electives such as robotics, swim team, English Language Arts Allstars, Latin dance, karate, and musical theater taught by Edwards staff and outside providers.

The Results

AT THE END of year one of implementing the partner-dependent ELT model, the Edwards faculty and partner staff were hopeful that their time, planning, and effort would pay off in improved student performance. They knew that the students were experiencing more arts, academics, athletics, and hands-on learning than they had before. They knew that students enjoyed the longer day and parents were pleased. But the Edwards had a history of disappointment when it came to the most public measure of their success: the set of state exams known as the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System).

When MCAS scores were released, Edwards students demonstrated dramatic gains, including across-the-board improvement in math scores. These gains far exceeded the statewide average and established the Edwards as a leader among the schools participating in the ELT pilot.

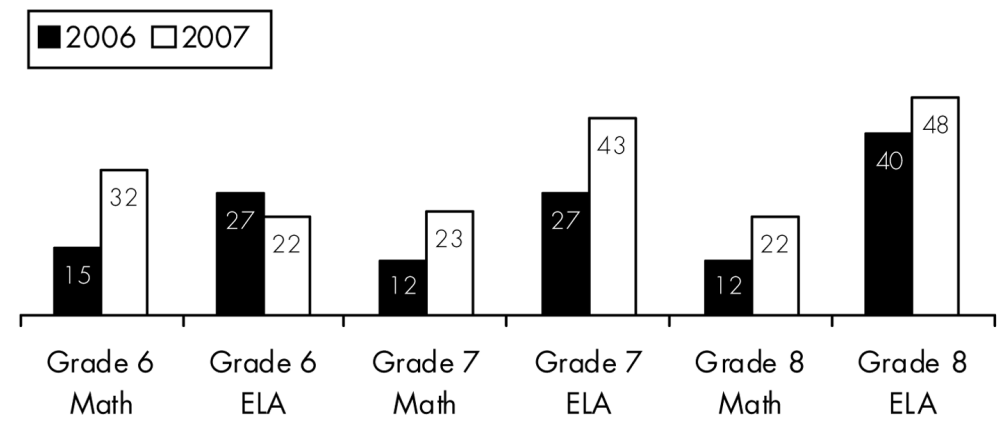
Lessons from the Edwards experience

Despite some bumps in the road, the first year of ELT built the foundation for a strong partnership among the teams at the Edwards and at Citizen Schools. But questions remain about the financial costs of the improvements, how broadly the initiative can be scaled, and whether and how the range of ELT models will continue to show improved results.

To the right are two sets of recommendations, one geared toward practitioners and one toward policymakers, interested in implementing a partner-dependent ELT model.

Changes in MCAS proficiency rates, spring 2006 to spring 2007

Before and after implementation of ELT schedule and partnership



Recommendations for practitioners

1. **Start planning early**, ideally a year before the program is scheduled to launch.
2. **Stage goals**. Envision three years and stagger your targets.
3. Initiate and maintain a **close collaboration** between school leadership and your partner organization leadership.
4. **Build time for common planning** and ongoing problem solving between partner teachers and regular school teachers.
5. Select **teachers who are given responsibility** for helping the partner(s) succeed.
6. Target content to **level the playing field**. Split extra learning time between core academics and enrichment and customize it for individuals.
7. **Build longer periods** to minimize transitions and enable off-site classes to expose children to outside people and places.
8. **Cultivate a love of learning** in disengaged students. Resist the urge to use all or most of ELT for traditional academic instruction. Struggling students will rebel if the longer day just means more time accentuating their weaknesses.
9. **Give young people choice**. Students are happier—and more ready to learn—when they have a say in the programming of their day.

Recommendations for districts and states

1. **Require all students** in a school or at least all students in a grade **to participate** in extra learning time to ensure a sense of community and fairness.
2. **Don't compel school-day teachers to work**. Adjust the schedule so that in-school teachers have the option to work part but not all of the additional ELT time.
3. **More time**. Adding 2.5 to 3 hours per day, at least four days per week, allows for a full hour of extra academics and 90 to 120 minutes for meaningful enrichment activities.
4. Anticipate that the **resource-heavy students** in your school will **need at least the same level of staff support** in a longer day.
5. **Set a realistic budget** that allows for high-quality service to high-need students.
6. Plan for a **multi-year investment in staff**, both from the school and from external partners.
7. Plan for **private/public cost sharing**. Just as schools can't do it alone, neither schools nor their nonprofit partners can fund ELT independently.