



**October 25, 2006**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Massachusetts Dramatically Increases Commitment to Expanded Learning Time  
for Public School Students**

*- 29 School Districts Receive Grants to Explore Increasing Academics and Enrichment  
Opportunities -*

Boston – The Massachusetts Department of Education dramatically expanded the state’s initiative to reinvent the school schedule yesterday in awarding \$324,000 in planning grants to 29 public school districts. These districts will spend up to one year exploring options for increasing academic and enrichment time by at least 25 percent.

Massachusetts remains the only state in the nation to fund the redesign of the traditional school calendar in multiple districts. Massachusetts ELT efforts, spearheaded by the Department of Education and education non-profit Massachusetts 2020, began in force last year with the first ever allocation of planning grants; the effort has so far resulted in 10 schools expanding the school day for all students by more than 25 percent this fall.

“Providing our students with additional learning time is one of the greatest commitments we can make to their academic success. When students have more time to learn, they are more likely to become proficient in math and English and master skills that will help them succeed in today’s complex global society,” said Jennifer Davis, president of Massachusetts 2020, the organization assisting schools in planning for and implementing a new school day. “In addition, more time for arts, music and physical education engages students, motivates them and encourages them to stay in school.”

This class of 29 planning districts will have as much as a year and a half to investigate how they will expand the school day and/or year and decide whether or not a new schedule is right for their students, teachers and families. Participating schools will be required to design a new day that increases learning time by at least 25 percent, the equivalent of more than 90 minutes per day. School can also consider a longer school year; last year, most districts decided to expand the day rather than the year. The additional time must be dedicated to academic studies and enrichment programming and also include more planning and professional development time for teachers.

“This is an exciting initiative, and calls for districts to rethink everything from how they organize their school day to teaching practices to how they can better engage each student in their learning,” said Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll. “This presents a tremendous – and worthwhile - challenge for any district. I look forward to seeing the results in each school.”

In the same Department of Education meeting yesterday where ELT planning grants were announced, the DOE board voted to raise the passing score high school students must achieve on MCAS math and English Language Arts tests.

“We expect more and more from our students today, and that is powerful and positive message to send to them. However, we cannot expect them to achieve more if they don't have the learning time necessary to succeed,” Representative Patricia Haddad, the co-chair of the Committee on Education in the state legislature. “The selection of 29 planning districts signals the significant role expanded learning time must have in our efforts to improve our schools and provide the best opportunities for our public school students.”

The expansion of the school day has received bipartisan support in Massachusetts and has been heralded by several gubernatorial candidates.

Thirty-six districts applied for this year's planning grants, up from 21 districts last year.

Now more than 10 percent of all public school districts in Massachusetts have expressed interest in expanding their school schedule by up to two hours per day. The 29 districts awarded planning grants come from across the Commonwealth, including from Pittsfield and Adams to Boston, Methuen, and Barnstable. Other districts include New Bedford, Northampton, Southbridge, Taunton, Framingham and Brockton. Three districts – Boston, Malden and Worcester – are currently implementing an expanded day in some district schools and received new planning grants to explore increasing the number of schools following a lengthened day.

The 10 schools currently implementing a new day have utilized the additional time to improve student achievement and engage students in enrichment programming that was not provided until now. Some schools have increased the length of class periods for math and English Language Arts classes by nearly an hour per day so that students can participate in engaging hands-on projects that help them apply new skills in real-life situations. One school created competitive math leagues to help students with their math skills. Other schools have combined academics and enrichment in classes such as Mandarin Chinese, filmmaking, dance, girls' health, nutrition, apprenticeships and musical theater.

Planning grant districts will convene teams of teachers, parents, students and administrators to investigate the best strategies for expanding the school schedule in their district. Districts will hold public meetings, seek the input of community stakeholders,

and decide if an expanded schedule is a viable option for their students, teachers, and families.

Receipt of a planning grant does not guarantee a school or district will implement an expanded school day. Districts that receive approval of their implementation plan by the DOE must also reach an agreement on a new schedule with the local teacher's union. Approved districts will open their redesigned schools in September 2007 or 2008, pending state allocation in the FY2007 and FY2008 budgets and the preference of the district and the schools.

The need to expand the time students have for learning is the result of several factors. Schools in the United States have raised educational expectations for students without giving them more time to achieve them. The current school schedule was designed for agrarian families in the early 20th century, not for the complex and global economy of the 21st century. In addition, mandatory testing in math and English has aggressively eaten away at the time once dedicated to arts, enrichment, physical education, even science and social studies.

Currently, Massachusetts lags behind most industrialized countries – including Turkey, Hungary, and Mexico – in instructional hours per week and total learning hours per year. In China, all students have 30 percent more time to learn than U.S. students currently have.

“This is one of the most meaningful education reform efforts happening in the country,” said Chris Gabrieli, chairman of Massachusetts 2020. “We are extremely excited to welcome a new class of 29 districts. These parents, teachers and administrators will build on the innovations of our current ELT schools and continue to set new standards for public education in Massachusetts and the country.”

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