Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond

Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time

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Across the United States, state education agencies and school districts face daunting challenges and difficult decisions for restarting schools as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. As state and district leaders prepare for what schooling will look like in 2020 and beyond, there is an opportunity to identify evidence-based policies and practices that will enable them to seize this moment to rethink school in ways that can transform learning opportunities for students and teachers alike.

Our current system took shape almost exactly a century ago, when school designs and funding were established to implement mass education on an assembly-line model organized to prepare students for their "places in life"—judgments that were enacted within contexts of deep-seated racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural prejudices. In a historical moment when we have more knowledge about human development and learning, when society and the economy demand a more challenging set of skills, and when—at least in our rhetoric—there is a greater social commitment to equitable education, it is time to use the huge disruptions caused by this pandemic to reinvent our systems of education. The question is: How we can harness these understandings as we necessarily redesign school? How can we transform what has not been working for children and for our society into a future that carries us forward into a more equitable future?

This section is part of a larger report, *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*, that focuses on how policymakers as well as educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which that takes place. The full report provides an overarching framework to inform the restart of schools while also providing a long-term vision that can guide leaders toward new and enduring ways to address educational quality and inequity. It illustrates how policymakers and educators can:

1. Close the digital divide
2. Strengthen distance and blended learning
3. Assess what students need
4. Ensure supports for social and emotional learning
5. Redesign schools for stronger relationships
6. Emphasize authentic, culturally responsive learning
7. Provide expanded learning time
8. Establish community schools and wraparound supports
9. Prepare educators for reinventing schools
10. Leverage more adequate and equitable school funding

This section provides research, state and local examples, and policy recommendations for how policymakers and educators can provide expanded learning time. For the full report, go to http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/restarting-reinventing-school-covid.

Priority 7: Provide Expanded Learning Time

Since schools closed nationwide in March, students have had uneven access to distance learning. A June 2020 survey of nearly 500 nationally representative districts found that, while 85% delivered some kind of materials to students, only one third required teachers to provide remote instruction in which they engaged and interacted with all of their students around the curriculum content (e.g., through online lessons, recorded lectures, or one-on-one support via phone or computer). These expectations were greatly disparate between affluent and lower-wealth communities, as well as between urban and rural districts. Some districts in which students lacked consistent internet access simply sent packets of worksheets home.

The lost opportunities for school-year instruction were compounded by the lack of summer and after-school enrichment opportunities, particularly for students from low-income or immigrant families. Those who traditionally have had the fewest educational opportunities have received even less support over the past several months.

The unequal access to learning during the pandemic further exacerbates the vast differences between learning opportunities that students from lower-income and upper-income families are routinely exposed to during out-of-school hours. Research suggests that students from middle- and upper-income families typically spend 6,000 more hours in educational activities than students in low-income families by the time they reach 6th grade.[1]

These opportunity gaps translate to substantial differences in academic achievement. Research estimates that the cumulative summer learning gap over multiple years accounts for more than half of the 9th-grade achievement difference between students from lower-income families and their more affluent peers, which in turn contributes to whether or not students enter college-track high school programs and meet college-going requirements.[2] The U.S. public education system's 6-hour day and 180-day year cannot, on its own, offset the gap in out-of-school learning opportunities between students from more and less affluent families.

With 55 million students out of school and receiving highly disparate education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of lost learning time will be widely felt. A McKinsey report suggests that these negative effects could last a lifetime and disproportionately impact Black and Latino/a students from low-income families. Expanded learning time (ELT) is a means by which to recover lost learning opportunities, whether in person or online.

What Students Need

As a number of back-to-school frameworks have argued,[3] a critical approach to restarting and reinventing schooling will be to provide expanded learning time and opportunities for all students, with special attention paid to students with special education needs and those who are English learners. ELT takes place before and after the typical school day and over summer vacation and other scheduled breaks and is one of the four pillars of a comprehensive community school strategy.[4] (See "Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports.") While many schools offer after-school programs and weekend enrichment opportunities, these opportunities do not necessarily constitute ELT. Quality ELT is not just an add-on program, field trip, or enrichment opportunity; it complements the learning that takes place during the typical school day in ways that support essential curricular standards and the learning activities developed to achieve those standards.

The impact of ELT has been studied by researchers and program evaluators for decades, and an extensive body of research indicates that additional high-quality learning time leads to positive achievement and engagement outcomes for students. For example, a meta-analysis of 15 empirical studies selected for their methodological rigor found that 14 of the studies of extended days and/ or years demonstrated positive achievement outcomes for students.[5] Additional research reviews point to similar findings, often emphasizing that ELT is especially beneficial for students from low-income families, students of color, and students who are academically behind.[6]
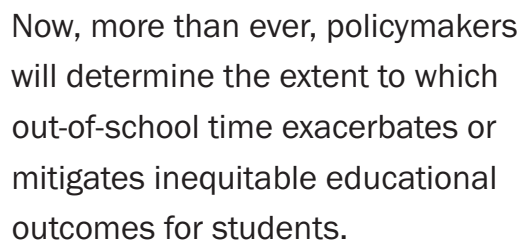
In the current context, ELT will be particularly important for English learners. For many of these students, these months away from school have meant a lack of exposure to English and adequate online instruction. As a consequence, many will need additional learning time—above and beyond that provided for other students. Students who are English learners will benefit from targeted language instruction (preferably in both English and their primary language) to catch up, as well as regular opportunities to be mixed with other students. In many cases, they will also need social and emotional supports due to the stress they have experienced given recent Administration efforts to break up families and deport parents.

A research synthesis from the Wallace Foundation notes that quality out-of-school programs that produce positive effects on outcomes offer targeted instruction focused on particular academic and/or social and emotional skills; create a warm, positive climate; enable consistent and frequent participation; and employ a stable group of trained, dedicated instructors who work effectively with youth. Given the strong evidence base that links well-designed additional learning time to positive student outcomes, it is encouraging to see that ELT appears in the majority of state plans for reopening schools that have been developed thus far.

Another form of extended learning is preschool education. Investments in early childhood programs, such as Head Start, lead to substantial gains in attainment and earnings,[7] and those investments could be greatly expanded to reach more eligible children. But high-quality preschool is not available to many eligible students both because of inadequate public funding and because many programs run for only 3–4 hours each day, making them inaccessible to many children from working families. Part-day programs, furthermore, are less effective than school-day programs in boosting child outcomes.

What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

Now, more than ever, policymakers will determine the extent to which out-of-school time exacerbates or mitigates inequitable educational outcomes for students. COVID-19 has further illuminated what we have long known: Our current school schedule cannot meet the needs of many students. Innovations made now will have lasting benefits, as school closures are likely to become more common, not only due to public health emergencies, but also due to increasingly common climate crises.[8]

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In the short term, state and local education leaders can provide opportunities to help make up for learning time lost to the COVID-19 pandemic with resources focused on students who have been most impacted by school closures. In the long term, policymakers also have an opportunity to promote ELT in order to alleviate the out-of-school time opportunity gap by providing high-quality, meaningful learning opportunities for all students. These opportunities should focus on acceleration rather than remediation, building on students' strengths rather than adopting a deficit-based approach.

Infuse high-quality tutoring within and beyond the school day

As one team of researchers noted in explaining the rationale for investing in tutoring:

> Students who fall behind grade-level material tend to stay behind. When these students miss developing crucial foundational skills, they can have major difficulties in subsequent learning tasks, which worsens the gap between them and their grade-level peers as they move from one grade to the next. This persistent mismatch between the learning needs of students and what classroom instruction delivers can seriously undermine students' chances of success in the workforce and beyond.[9]

There is a well-established literature on the positive effects of tutoring, which can produce large gains even when conducted virtually.[10] When students return in the fall, whether in-person, online, or in some hybrid form, many will need individualized attention to support learning gains. Effective tutoring is accomplished not by a cadre of ever-changing, untrained volunteers, but by a focused group of trained individuals working consistently with individuals or small groups of students. In particular, research supports high-dosage tutoring in which tutors work consistently every day for full class sessions (during or after school) with students one-to-one or in very small groups, often accomplishing large gains in relatively short periods of time.

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These may be specially trained teachers, as in programs such as Reading Recovery that use a set of well-defined methods one-on-one or in small groups and have been found to have strong positive effects on reading gains for struggling readers,[11] including students with special education needs and English learners.[12] They may also be recent college graduates, including AmeriCorps volunteers, who receive training to work with students, as in the Boston MATCH Education program, replicated by SAGA Education in Chicago. In daily 50-minute sessions added to their regular math classes, two students working with a tutor gained an additional 1 to 2 years of math proficiency by focusing on the specific areas they needed to master while also preparing for their standard class. Tutors in programs such as these have the advantage of a well-developed curriculum with frequent formative assessments to gauge and guide where support is needed.[13]

Although districts often think of tutoring as too expensive to undertake as a strategy for helping students master missed skills, because of the fact that it can be structured to be conducted by cross-age peers, volunteers, paraprofessionals, or trained teachers—and because of the size and speed

of the gains students can make—economists find that tutoring is one of the more cost-effective strategies to promote accelerated student learning.[14] In light of this powerful evidence, the United Kingdom is now investing more than a billion dollars for tutoring to help all students catch up on what they missed during the spring.

Tutoring is also a powerful tool for ensuring that every child has an adult in school whom they can trust. Lawrence, MA, was one of the lowest-performing districts in the state prior to a state-led turnaround. Extended learning time was an important part of the district's success in raising achievement. The district partnered with MATCH Education to offer intensive mathematics tutoring during or after school to pairs of the 9th- and 10th-grade students attending two of the district's lowest-performing high schools. In addition, expert teachers were recruited and paid to offer "Acceleration Academies" over weeklong vacation breaks. These provided struggling students with targeted, small-group instruction in a single subject.[15]

Expand high-quality after-school programs

Extended learning time and opportunities, used well, can accelerate learning and reduce the learning opportunity gap between what students from low-income families and their peers from middle- and upper-income families experience during out-of-school hours.

Additional time will not in and of itself promote positive student outcomes; **additional learning time must be high quality and meaningful in order to move the needle on student achievement and engagement.**[16] Among the things that can make out-of-school programs more meaningful are connections to the work students are doing in school and culturally relevant strategies that make learning engaging and allow students to explore ideas deeply.

A strong example of this type of collaboration exists in Oakland Unified School District's community schools, where ELT is a core model of their full-service community schools approach. Schools in Oakland, CA, use a number of different strategies to increase collaboration, such as including partner staff in monthly faculty meetings and providing regular opportunities for ELT staff to meet with teachers to learn about current curricular goals and units. In some Oakland schools, ELT staff are further integrated into the regular school day; they provide extra assistance to teachers by mentoring students and conducting pullout sessions for small-group instruction. A study of the implementation of the community schools approach in Oakland highlighted one school in which ELT staff and regular teaching staff worked so closely together that the principal no longer referred to ELT as "after-school programming." In this school, where nearly all of the 6th- and 7th-grade students stay after the traditional school day to participate in coding classes, dance classes, and STEM, the after-school program is referred to as the 8th and 9th periods, indicating an incorporation of ELT into the regular school schedule. In this way, the close collaboration among all adults who work with students allows for a seamless integration of all student learning opportunities.[17]

Similarly, an extended school-day program offered by Meriden Public Schools District in Connecticut integrated expanded learning time with traditional instruction. In 2012, the superintendent and the local teachers union in Meriden, CT, partnered with the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club to add 100 minutes per day (roughly equivalent to 40 additional school days) of personalized learning time at three low-performing schools. The three participating schools reengineered their schedules to include an enrichment block, during which community partners staff the classrooms as teachers and provide instruction in three key enrichment areas: healthy

living, literacy, and STEM. A key component of Meriden's after-school program is that staff at the community organizations worked closely with teachers to align after-school activities with learning during the traditional day and with the schools' instructional goals. Additionally, the participating schools included community partners in professional learning communities with school staff. This type of collaboration between teachers and providers of ELT ensures that additional learning time is strongly linked with the learning opportunities during the school day and that all learning opportunities complement one another in service of supporting primary instructional goals. The results in Meriden were promising: Two of the three participating schools saw gains in attendance rates, core subject test scores, and teacher ratings, which exceeded districtwide averages.

In addition to aligning activities with a school's academic learning goals, **ELT learning opportunities can be more successful if they incorporate meaningful activities that engage deeper learning pedagogies with content that is connected to students' lives outside of school.**

Citizen Schools (CS) is an example of ELT programming that engages deeper learning pedagogies for students. CS youth participate in apprenticeships that consist of hands-on learning projects led by volunteer citizen teachers. Apprentices work in small groups to do project-based work such as litigating mock trials, publishing children's books, and building solar cars. These apprenticeships are complemented with activities that help students develop their organizational and study skills, along with homework help. Programs culminate with opportunities for participants to publicly present their projects. CS's 8th Grade Academy also includes programming to help students develop their leadership and decision-making skills to prepare for college.[18] A rigorous, quasi-experimental evaluation of the academy identified positive effects on attendance and enrollment, math and reading achievement, promotion, and graduation.[19]

As is the case with all learning, ELT can be more meaningful and engaging if the curriculum authentically connects to student backgrounds. ELT should aim to ground learning in students' prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds and to connect learning to real-world issues. This could include their individual experiences with COVID-19 in their communities. Programming should also prioritize the increased need for addressing the social and emotional needs of students, who may be experiencing increased levels of anxiety, grief, and uncertainty about the future due to the pandemic.[20] Nearly every state that has developed a plan for reopening schools post-COVID-19 has emphasized the need to integrate social and emotional learning into traditional curricula, and this emphasis should extend to ELT as well, particularly learning opportunities designed to address lost instructional time for those students who were most impacted by school closures. (See "Priority 4: Ensure Supports for Social and Emotional Learning" for more information.)

Create high-quality summer programs

States and districts can plan to provide expanded learning time for students next summer, even as this summer comes to a close. Well-designed summer programs are most effective when students experience them for multiple summers. Many types of summer programs, offered to all grade levels, have been found to be effective, including summer programs focused on learning at home, social and emotional well-being, and employment and career development, as well as those focused on academic learning. In a systematic review conducted by the RAND Corporation, more than 40 of 43 summer programs that have been rigorously evaluated showed positive impacts on at least one youth outcome, ranging from reading fluency to increased social and emotional skills and GPA.[21] When developing or selecting a summer program, it is important to invest in programs that are intentionally designed to
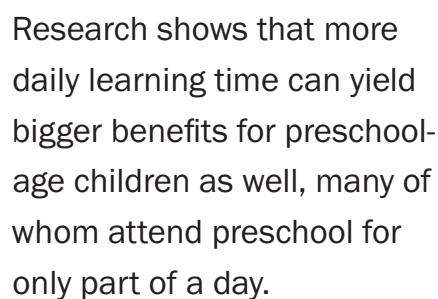
meet student and community needs; are of sufficient duration to make an impact; and provide high-quality, meaningful learning opportunities. These include stable, trained staff; a systematic approach to the curriculum; and strategies to ensure consistent, stable participation by students.

Getting high rates of student participation depends on an engaging curriculum that is highly motivating for students. A summer program that illustrates this principle with a well-developed community-based philosophy is the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools. CDF Freedom Schools are modeled after the 1963 Mississippi Freedom Schools, which sought to invest in communities by developing leaders who could exercise their political power. CDF Freedom Schools partner with community organizations, churches, and schools to provide literacy-rich summer programs for k–12 students. Programs vary in length from 5 to 8 weeks and include a curriculum designed to promote cultural and historical consciousness. The program incorporates five content areas: social action and civic engagement, intergenerational leadership, nutrition and health, parent and family involvement, and academic enrichment.

A typical CDF Freedom School day begins with a community meeting called Harambee (a Kiswahili word that means "let's come together"). This is followed by a 3-hour block of literacy instruction during which students engage with the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC). The IRC incorporates a carefully selected array of books that reflect a wide variety of cultures and experiences as well as activities that are designed to be engaging and develop students' love of reading. Afternoons are dedicated to activities related to the themes included in the IRC. Social action and community services are key components of CDF Freedom Schools. At the start of the program, staff and students work together to identify issues affecting their community, and throughout the course of the program, students develop and implement a social action plan to address the community issues they identified. These social action projects embody a foundational idea that the CDF Freedom Schools work to instill in students: I can and must make a difference. A multiyear evaluation reported that participation in CDF Freedom Schools was associated with positive character development outcomes and achievement on standardized reading tests.[22]

Expand the reach and duration of early learning programs

One critical way to expand learning time for children is to ensure high-quality early learning. In addition, research shows that more daily learning time can yield bigger benefits for preschool-age children as well, many of whom attend preschool for only part of a day.[23] While some part-day programs have shown strong results, most of the highly effective programs, especially for children from low-income families, provide full-day preschool. An evaluation of the long-term impact of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, for example, showed that children attending the program for a full day scored better on measures of social-emotional development, math and reading skills, and physical health than similar children attending the same program for only part of a day.[24] A national evaluation of Head Start also suggests that children who enrolled in the full-day program performed better in reading and math.[25]

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Enact policies that support expanded learning time

Several states and localities are leading the way by supporting districts and schools to provide meaningful increases in learning time for students. For example, to expand early learning time, Michigan's state preschool program, Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), allocates funds based on part-day slots but provides a full-day option in which local grantees can use either two part-day GSRP slots or blend a part-day GSRP and part-day Head Start slot together to create a full-day slot. All Head Start and GSRP policies and regulations must be applied to the blended slots, with the highest standard from either program given precedence, ensuring quality.[26] As a result, approximately 80% of children attend high-quality full-day GSRP programs that operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district's or charter school's 1st-grade program.[27]

In 2005, the Massachusetts Legislature established the Expanded Learning Time Initiative. The initiative provides grants for schools serving high-need students to provide an additional 300 hours of instruction to their school year. Schools that received the grant were able to use funding to add days to their school year, lengthen their school day, or both. The initiative requires that additional time be used for high-quality learning opportunities that engage students in core subjects as well, and that enrichment activities are aligned with state standards. Additionally, it directs schools to set aside time for lesson planning for teachers as well as professional development for teachers and staff from community-based organizations that partner with schools to provide additional programming.[28]

In 2012, the Florida Legislature funded an additional hour per day of literacy instruction and reading time in 100 elementary schools with the state's lowest reading scores. Two years later, the initiative was expanded to include 300 elementary schools (out of roughly 1,800 elementary schools across the state). The Florida extended-day program requires that instructional approaches during additional time are evidence-based, adapted for student ability, and cross-curricular (incorporating reading material from other core subjects). During additional instructional time, students must have opportunities for guided practice and instruction that includes vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, and comprehension. A rigorous evaluation found that the extended school day had significant, positive effects on student reading achievement; in one school year, student test scores improved by the equivalent of one month of extra learning.[29] These findings are aligned with research reviews of ELT, which suggest additional time will be most effective when it is aligned with student needs.[30]

In its recently approved budget and reopening plan, Florida has already allocated $64 million toward summer recovery in July and August for students with significant academic needs, and it has allocated school-year funding toward the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club.[31] States can also provide a suite of options even in the absence of additional funding. Oklahoma, for example, advocates for modified scheduling with longer periods, longer days, and longer breaks to allow for Acceleration Academies—a strategy that appears in many state plans. Even in times of fiscal crisis, communities have options for learning beyond the traditional school day in order to ameliorate the negative effects of the pandemic.

States can use a variety of federal programs for these purposes, including multiple funding streams under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1
Examples of Federal Funding Streams Through ESSA That Can Support Summer Programs

- Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A)
- Migrant Education Program (Title I, Part C)
- Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II, Part A)
- Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) State Literacy Discretionary/ Competitive Grant (Title II, Part B)
- Student Support and Academic Enrichment Programs (Title IV, Part A)
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grants (Title IV, Part B)
- Promise Neighborhoods Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F)
- Full Service Community Schools Program Discretionary/Competitive Grant (Title IV, Part F)

Source: McCombs, J. S., Augustine, C. H., Unlu, F., Ziol-Guest, K. M., Naftel, S., Gomez, C. J., Marsh, T., Akinniranye, G., & Todd, I. (2019). *Investing in successful summer programs: A review of evidence under the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2836.html.

Resources

- A School Year Like No Other Demands a New Learning Day: A Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can Help (Afterschool Alliance). This blueprint offers building blocks for school–community partnerships to address equity and co-construct the learning day in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (Research for Action). Based on a literature review of studies published since 2000, this review summarizes the effectiveness of specific after-school programs. The review uses the ESSA evidence framework to assess the evidence of over 60 after-school programs. A companion guide provides profiles of each after-school program included in the review as well as studies of each program's effectiveness.

- Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success, 2nd Ed. (RAND Corporation). Based on thousands of hours of observations, interviews, and surveys, this report provides guidance for district leaders and their partners for launching, improving, and sustaining effective summer learning programs.

- Investing in Successful Summer Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (RAND Corporation). This report provides current information about the effectiveness of summer programs for k–12 students to help practitioners, funders, and policymakers make evidence-based investments. The review uses the ESSA evidence framework to assess the effectiveness of summer programs and includes descriptions of 43 summer programs that align with ESSA evidence standards.

- Time in Pursuit of Education Equity: Promoting Learning Time Reforms That Cross Ideological Divides to Benefit Students Most in Need (AASA). This *School Administrator* article authored by Jeannie Oakes provides implementation lessons that school leaders and policymakers can use as they seek to expand learning time.

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