

Maximize instructional time

Maximizing academic learning time is a critical tool which is needed to improve student achievement and requires multiple policies and programs to support great teaching and learning. School districts around the state and country are looking for ways to improve student achievement by increasing instructional time, because simply increasing the school day or year does not guarantee increased academic learning time. In fact, doing so may actually create unintended negative consequences.

PSEA Recommendations

Implement targeted policies and programs to increase academic learning time. The most effective policies and programs may not necessarily require changes to the length of school day or year, but may involve changes in instruction and in allocation of time within the school day. Where changes to the school day or year are contemplated, the process needs to be addressed through the local collective bargaining agreement. Regardless of the length of the day or year, there are many ways to support maximizing academic learning time.

- Provide the resources teachers need to engage students in meaningful, appropriately-leveled learning during the traditional school day. These resources may include smaller classes, engaging model curricula, and models of successful programs that relate learning to real-life situations.
- Support the adoption and implementation of comprehensive school-wide positive behavior support and behavior management programs to minimize the amount of instructional time that is disrupted when school employees need to address behavior management issues.
- Provide sufficient funds for before- and after-school learning experiences, staffed by fully-certified and well-compensated teachers, to targeted students who need them most.
- Ensure that all teachers have sufficient planning time to develop engaging, differentiated instruction for all students in all classes.
- Alter the templates for school improvement planning that are required of districts that have not met federal student achievement requirements; include an examination of the use of allocated school time as it relates to student achievement.
- Where an extended school day and/or year are supported by the local community, ensure that the extended time is collectively bargained, that educators receive appropriate compensation for their work, and that the extended hours of instruction are utilized in a manner that extends learning time, not just time in school.

Effective use of academic time is proven to work

Some strategies for increasing academic time include extending the school day, extending the school year, reducing recess, and re-allocating instructional time from non-tested to tested subjects. Schools have also developed a range of before- and after-school instructional options, including the supplemental educational services required by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Increasing instructional time is appealing in part because it is easy to measure, and in part because of a straightforward assumption that instructional time and learning are directly related. But the relationship between time and learning is complicated; research suggests that the quality of instructional time is at least as important as the quantity of instructional time, and increases in high-quality instructional time benefit certain groups of students more than others.¹

What the research says about instructional time

Not all time is equal. Time in school can be categorized into four different types:

- *Allocated time* includes all of the hours a child attends school.
- *Allocated class time* is a subcategory of allocated time that counts all of the time a child is in class (excluding recess, lunch, time transferring classes, etc.).
- *Instructional time* counts the amount of the allocated class time that is used for instruction (excluding instructional disruptions related to discipline, record-keeping, etc.).
- *Academic learning time* is the portion of instructional time in which a student is paying attention, receiving instruction that is appropriately leveled, and learning is taking place.

What matters for learning is *maximizing academic learning time*. Increasing the time *available* for learning (by increasing the length of the school day or year) is not likely to be productive unless the time is used to engage students productively in learning.²

The impact of more instructional time on different students is not equal. Under the right conditions, maximizing academic learning time (rather than allocated or instructional time) is related to increases in student achievement.³ However, extended academic learning time, under the right conditions, has a greater impact on student achievement in schools that serve low-performing students.⁴

Maximizing the use of school time requires attention to other reforms. Schools that have seen positive results through the use of extended learning time often have paired increases in

learning time with other reforms to maximize the use of the new time. These reforms create the conditions for the best use of time and include efforts to build stronger leadership, differentiated and engaging teaching, high academic expectations among students, frequent performance monitoring, and a safe, supportive school environment. Overall, it is an oversimplification to expect that merely increasing time will enhance learning.

Simply increasing time can have unintended negative consequences. For example, Edison Schools, a for-profit education management firm, used to operate schools with a substantially longer day and year, but found that schools experienced more student absenteeism during the four additional weeks of school they had scheduled into the academic year. Eventually, Edison backed off of its commitment to a longer school year but retained the longer school day model. Still, academic results from the Edison model with a longer school day are mixed.⁵ Another experiment in extending the school day did not increase student achievement and two-thirds of staff reported tired children, “burned out” teachers, and several other reasons why they believed the experiment should be discontinued.⁶ Simply increasing time, without paying attention to other organizational needs, may create unintended consequences without producing the intended outcomes.

Extending the school day or year alone, without ensuring more academic learning time, may not be an efficient use of resources. Researchers have found, based on cost-benefit analyses, that extended day and year programs are tremendously costly but with little benefit or increase in student achievement. One study that examined extended time in relation to computer-aided instruction, class-size reduction, and cross age tutoring found that increasing allocated time returned the smallest benefit per dollar of investment.⁷ Others have concluded that relatively large and very costly increases in allocated time in school would be necessary in order to develop small changes in academic achievement.⁸

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¹ Education Sector. (2007). *Time on the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time*. Washington, DC: Education Sector.

² Blai, B., Jr. (1986). “Education Reform: It’s about ‘Time,’” *Clearing House* v60 (1), 38-40.

³ Aronson, J. J. Zimmerman, & L. Carlos. (1998). “Improving Student Achievement by Extending School: Is It Just a Matter of Time?” San Francisco: WestEd.

⁴ Smith, B. Et al. (2005). “Extended Learning Time and Student Accountability: Assessing Outcomes and Options for Elementary and Middle Grades,” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 41(2) 195-236, cited in *American Educational Research Association*. (2007). *Research Points: Essential Information for Education Policy*. 5(2), Winter.

⁵ Education Sector. (2007). “Time on the Clock: Rethinking the Way Schools Use Time,” Education Sector.

⁶ Salvador, S.K. (2008). “Billingsville Expanded Day Evaluation Report,” Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools.

⁷ Levin, H.M., Glass, G.V. & Meister, G.R. (1987). “Different Approaches to Improving Performance at School,” *Zeitschrift fur Internationale Erziehungs und Sozial Wissenschaftliche Forschung* 3: 156-176. Cited in:

<http://www.schoolyear.info/drglassresearch.pdf>.

⁸ Levin, H.M. & Tsang, M.C. (1987). “The Economics of Student Time,” *Economics of Education Review* 6: 357-364. Cited in . <http://www.schoolyear.info/drglassresearch.pdf>.