

The Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative



THE ENTRY POINT

A public/private partnership between the state department of education and an intermediary organization that supports schools, with the help of community providers, offers academic and enrichment opportunities in an expanded school day to improve student performance and increase engagement.

THE CHALLENGE

What funding, capacities, and supports need to be in place on political, district, school, and community levels to move the expanded day to a national scale for a diverse array of districts?

THE PARTNERS

Massachusetts 2020
The Massachusetts Department of Education
Boston Public Schools
Citizen Schools

The Story

In September 2006, ten schools in five urban districts in Massachusetts began implementing an expanded day, adding two to three hours daily to the amount of time students were spending in school. These ten schools formed the initial cohort of the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative (ELT), the nation's first state-sponsored, multidistrict effort to use an expanded school calendar to improve academic performance and reintroduce enrichment programs that deeply engage students.

ELT is made possible by a unique public/private partnership between Massachusetts 2020, an educational nonprofit dedicated to expanding educational and economic opportunities for children and families across Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE). Convinced that the current public school schedule of 180 six-hour days, designed to meet nineteenth-century agrarian needs, was insufficient to prepare students for the demands of our global, information-based economy, Massachusetts 2020 began a research study in 2004 to look at schools that had expanded their day or year. Feeling strongly that an expanded day should be systemic and publicly funded, the organization used the results of this study, along with the expertise of an advisory board, to develop a workable policy design to present to the state legislature.

State leaders, including the House and Senate education committee chairs, worked with Massachusetts 2020 to develop ELT policy. In 2005, the legislature approved \$500,000 to provide planning grants of at least \$25,000 to twenty-five schools in sixteen districts throughout the state. In April 2006, implementation plans were approved for seventeen schools in eight districts, and the five districts that were able to negotiate labor agreements received funding for ten initial ELT schools. The state legislature approved \$6.5 million for ELT, which fully funded all ten schools at \$1300 per student and provided new planning grants for the 2007-2008 school year.

A key component of a district's success with ELT is the involvement of multiple stakeholders from the onset. Each district receiving a planning grant must form a task force of teachers, parents, principals, and community leaders to explore ELT and submit a proposal to increase learning time by 25 to 30 percent, or at least 300 hours per year.

The specific features of ELT look different at each school, but a few fundamental principles lie at the core of the initiative. Though the schools and districts applying to implement ELT do so voluntarily, the expanded time is mandatory for all students in the approved schools. Furthermore, the expanded time is not simply used for "add-ons" at the end of the school day. Rather, each school is encouraged to restructure the entire school day to provide enhanced instruction in core academics via hands-on, project-based learning, enrichment courses, individualized instruction, and time for teacher planning and professional development.

Massachusetts 2020 and the DOE play complementary roles in their partnership to support ELT. The DOE sets demanding criteria for participation and selects schools based on the strength and viability of their redesign proposals, looking for solid support from the teachers unions and school committees. The DOE has an annual accountability review process, requiring each district to track ELT schools on measurable goals for achievement, attendance, and participation in higher education. Jennifer Davis, co-founder and president of Massachusetts 2020, notes, "This initiative would not be possible if it weren't state driven."

In addition to being the initiative's catalyst and providing overall leadership, Massachusetts 2020 provides technical assistance to districts from planning through implementation and provides advocacy and research support. Technical assistance includes helping with the design and content of the expanded school day, building relationships with external partners, mediating union negotiations, working through logistical challenges, and more. Massachusetts 2020 has also secured funding for a private, multiyear evaluation of the initiative and worked with the DOE to develop the evaluation's framework.

ELT has seen promising results during its first year. The ten schools implementing ELT in 2006-2007 made greater gains in proficiency on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) than they had in previous years. The percentage of students reaching proficiency grew 44 percent in mathematics, 39 percent in English Language Arts, and 19 percent in science compared with the schools' average scores from 2002 through 2006. The number of ELT schools making AYP in mathematics doubled from three to six, and seven schools have made AYP in English Language Arts, compared with five in 2005-2006. ELT schools also nar-

rowed their achievement gap with the state in English Language Arts by over seven points. According to surveys conducted by Massachusetts 2020, 77 percent of parents and 70 percent of teachers have noticed a positive impact on students since ELT was implemented.

ELT in Action: The Clarence R. Edwards Middle School

Located in the Charlestown neighborhood of Boston, the Clarence R. Edwards Middle School was one of the ten schools to implement ELT in the fall of 2006. Edwards serves 303 students, nearly 87 percent of whom are low income. Edwards had failed to make AYP for several years and faced state takeover. School leaders opted to restructure with ELT; the school now operates from 7:20 am until 4:15 pm Monday through Thursday, with students dismissed at 11:40 am on Fridays. In recent years, Edwards has seen a steadily declining enrollment but, thanks to an aggressive marketing campaign to attract students and increase enrollment, has doubled the projected numbers of sixth-graders for 2008-2009.

Expanded time at Edwards features extra instruction in core academic subjects and electives including a variety of sports, karate, cooking, Latin and jazz dance, musical theater, robotics, and music production. In 2006-2007, the ELT academic focus at Edwards was mathematics. Seventh- and eighth-graders participated in math leagues, working in small teams to learn and practice math concepts, with weekly competitions to increase engagement. Edwards made AYP in both math and English in 2006-2007 and saw sharp increases in student performance on the MCAS. For the 2007-2008 school year, the program has expanded to include English and science leagues, with students placed in the subject areas in which they need the most help.

By the terms of the district's agreement with the Boston Teachers Union, participation in ELT is voluntary for permanent veteran teachers. In the first year of implementation, about 50 percent of teachers at Edwards participated in the math league portion of the expanded day, meaning that some groups were taught by paraprofessionals or teachers with expertise in a different subject area. Data showed that the students who made the greatest gains were taught by certified math teachers.

Though the work is exhausting, more teachers at Edwards bought in to the expanded day when they saw its positive impact on academic achievement and student engagement. With nearly 90 percent teacher participation this year, all students have the benefit of receiving additional support from appropriately certified faculty, and the schools' strongest teachers generally work with the lowest-performing students. Principal Jeff Riley says that careful planning is key: "You need to have the right people and use the additional time wisely." Teachers have found themselves called upon to take leadership roles, helping to plan the extended day and constructing the curriculum for the academic portion.

ELT's introduction of daily electives has had a noticeable impact on student engagement at Edwards. This year, the school put on a production of the popular *High School Musical* and had a special performance by the Boston Pops Orchestra. Following the concert, students were presented with \$25,000 worth of new musical instruments, courtesy of Fidelity Investments and the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation. Riley notes that these enrichment activities give the

school a certain “feeling,” observing, “Kids know if you care about them.” Prior to becoming an ELT school, after-school programming at Edwards drew low numbers of students and struggled with attendance and retention. Now that the enrichment classes are integrated into the school day, greater numbers of students are being served.

The Power of Partnership

Given the capacity needed to implement an expanded day, it was clear to schools that they couldn’t do it alone. Schools developed deeper and more complex relationships with community and nonprofit partner organizations that could provide a “second shift.” Outside providers that support the elective portion of Edwards’ expanded day include Medicine Wheel (an arts organization that engages students in a creative artistic community), Writers’ Express, the Charlestown Community Center, and the Boston Sports Museum.

A major partner for Edwards and for one other Boston ELT school is Citizen Schools, a national nonprofit that runs experiential education programs in thirty-six urban public middle schools in six states, with plans to expand even further nationally. Started in Boston in 1995, the organization’s program model includes hands-on “apprenticeships” taught by community volunteers, where students have the opportunity to master twenty-first-century skills like oral presentation and teamwork while learning about topics ranging from law and finance to double-dutch and cooking. Citizen Schools focuses on helping students develop the academic and leadership skills they need to succeed in school, get into college, and become leaders.

While Citizen Schools operates as an after-school program in eight of its ten Boston locations, two ELT schools in Boston have integrated the program into the expanded day. At Edwards and the Mario Umana Middle School Academy, Citizen Schools works with all sixth-grade students for both the academic and elective portions of the expanded day. Sixth-graders choose two apprenticeships per semester, each running for two hours a week for eleven weeks. They also learn “school navigation” – organizational and study skills – and participate in Second Step, a violence prevention program focusing on skills such as empathy, problem solving, tolerance and cooperation.

Citizen Schools works on a limited scale with twenty-six seventh-grade students at Edwards. As part of the seventh-grade program, Citizen Schools’ teachers coach students to work hard to achieve high grades, meet high expectations in all of their classes, and successfully complete complex projects around civil rights, the environment, world cultures, and leadership.

Because Citizen Schools is a key part of the expanded day at Edwards, the organization’s role has changed significantly. Citizen Schools’ staff members routinely attend school meetings and are respected by teachers as integral to the school. The Citizen Schools campus director for Edwards, Moriska Selby, is considered a school administrator. Selby says, “We have so many opportunities – everyone is on board. Teachers are recognizing that we’re in the school. It’s been different, but it has been positive.”

Increased responsibilities have brought new challenges for Citizen Schools, requiring the organization to alter its model to align with the school’s plan for the expanded day. To ensure consistency with the school’s core academic content, Citizen Schools’ staff members work

closely with teachers to learn what content is being taught and how it is presented. The focus on academic leagues at Edwards has led Citizen Schools' staff to use time previously earmarked for homework help to do math reviews, drills, and games that reinforce learning from core academic classes.

Capacity and Scale

Expanding the school day throughout the state has not been without its challenges. The initiative was initially conceived as one that would span urban, suburban, and rural districts. However, significant opposition surfaced in some districts, particularly those in middle-class suburban communities where quality after-school options were already accessible. The capacity needed to carry out an expanded day is great and requires teachers and community partners to move into significant new roles. Teacher burnout is a concern, and some schools experience difficulty fully staffing the expanded day. Logistical issues also created challenges for the initial cohort of schools, from providing students with snacks to arranging transportation to lighting parking lots on dark winter afternoons.

Even with its inherent challenges, the concept of expanded learning time is taking hold throughout Massachusetts. Nine additional schools were funded to implement an expanded day in 2007-2008, and forty-three schools from nineteen districts submitted preliminary plans to begin implementation in 2008-2009. Planning grants have been awarded to sixty-seven schools in twenty-eight districts that wish to begin expanded learning time in 2009-2010. Governor Deval Patrick budgeted \$13 million in funding for ELT for 2007-2008, and the proposed budget for 2008-2009 includes \$26 million.

As the number of participating schools in Massachusetts increases, expanded learning time is also going national. In October 2007, the National Center on Time & Learning was launched. Founded by Chris Gabrieli and Jennifer Davis, the co-founders of Massachusetts 2020, and Paul Reville, chair of the Massachusetts Board of Education and founder and president of the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, the National Center on Time & Learning aims to expand learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education for all children. The organization will support national, state, and local initiatives to add school time for academic and enrichment opportunities through research, public policy, and technical assistance.

In January of this year Senator Edward Kennedy, chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committee, visited Edwards to celebrate the success of ELT in Massachusetts. He also advocated for a national expansion of the initiative through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization, in which he and his House counterpart, U.S. Representative George Miller, are working to include a pilot to expand learning time. U.S. Representative Donald M. Payne has also introduced a bill to provide federal incentives for expanded learning initiatives nationwide.

The early results of the Expanded Learning Time Initiative here in Massachusetts are impressive and show real promise in preparing all children for a lifetime of success. I believe what we're doing with expanded learning here in Massachusetts is a model for the nation.

– Senator Edward M. Kennedy

Discussion Questions

- What kinds of supports do community-based organizations and other out-of-school programmatic providers need if they are to be integrated into the expanded learning time model?
- What are the implications of an expanded day for traditional after-school programs?
- How can teachers unions and district administration work together to negotiate teacher participation in an expanded day?
- Several communities, particularly those in middle-class suburban areas, were opposed to expanding the school day. How can community resistance be overcome to build the will for expanded learning time on a larger scale?

Site Team Members

Jennifer Davis is co-founder and president of Massachusetts 2020 and president and CEO of the National Center on Time & Learning. She has served in numerous federal, state, and local positions to improve education, including Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education in the Clinton administration, special assistant to Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, and executive director of Boston's citywide after-school learning initiative.

Jeffrey Riley is principal of the Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Charlestown. Previously, he was an academy director at Boston's largest high school, a suburban middle school principal, and, from 1998 to 2001, a principal intern and director of instruction at Edwards, when the school was recognized for having some of the highest improvement rates in the state.

Gilberto Rivera is a music teacher and a long-time building representative for the American Federation of Teachers at the Edwards Middle School. He is widely recognized as having one of the best middle school band programs in Boston and, last year, won the prestigious Mr. Holland's Opus Award, for which his students received over \$25,000 in free musical instruments.

Moriska Selby is the Citizen Schools campus director for the Edwards Middle School, where she pioneered modifications to the Citizen Schools' traditional program model in the successful inaugural year of Expanded Learning Time. She has eight years' experience as an educator. Over the next two years, while pursuing a doctoral degree in education, she will conduct research on the impact of a program similar to Citizen Schools on the life trajectory of youth in her native St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

For More Information

- Massachusetts 2020: <www.mass2020.org>
- The National Center on Time & Learning: <www.timeandlearning.org>
- Massachusetts Department of Education: <www.doe.mass.edu>
- Boston Public Schools: <<http://boston.k12.ma.us>>
- Citizen Schools: <www.citizenschools.org>