

Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy
Extended Learning and Parent Engagement in Education
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Mr. Kennedy: Mr. President, it's a privilege today to be introducing two bills to improve our schools and bring them into the 21st century. The Time for Innovation Matters in Education Act, or TIME Act, seeks to expand our 19th century school calendar to provide more time for learning across the curriculum. The Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged Act, or Keeping PACE Act, will encourage greater involvement of parents in their children's education, and engage community partners in supporting the comprehensive learning needs of students in school.

These bills take different approaches, but both address critical challenges for our nation's schools. By providing the time and resources for students to succeed, we can ensure that all students are equipped with the tools needed to be successful in the 21st century economy.

As a result of the current six hours a day, 180 days a year schedule, American students spend about 30 percent less time in school than students in other leading nations. This gap hinders the ability of our students to compete with their peers around the globe who derive a significant advantage by having more time to learn what they need to know. About 1,000 U.S. schools are already tackling this problem on their own, and now it's time for the federal government to step up and help more students obtain the time in school they need.

The TIME Act authorizes \$350 million next year, increasing to up to \$500 million in 2014, to support schools in expanding learning time by 300 hours a year and redesigning their school day to meet the needs of students and teachers. The Act promotes partnerships between schools and community-based organizations in expanding and redesigning the school schedule to give students a broader learning experience and encourage innovation. The goal of the Act is not merely to encourage schools to add more time at the end of the day, but to take a close look at how they use their time and redesign the entire school schedule for the benefit of students' learning experiences.

Studies document the difference an extra hour of school each day, a few more weeks of school each year, or additional time after or before school for tutoring can make to all students. According to these studies, the students for whom this time is most important for are the students we need to be focusing on – our neediest students. Students in disadvantaged families show a drop-off in learning over long summer recesses compared to their better-off classmates, and they fall farther behind each year. A 2007 study found that two-thirds of the reading achievement gap between 9th graders of low and high socioeconomic standing in Baltimore public schools can be traced to what they learned, or failed to learn, during their summers.

These students also are less likely to have parents with the time to help them with their school work. Expanded learning time can help these needy students catch up by shortening their summer recesses, providing more time for educators to support student learning, and giving schools the opportunity to provide these students with additional nutritious meals.

In addition to those at risk of falling behind, more time for learning helps students who are on grade level get ahead, by providing greater time for enrichment and a broader curriculum. Additional time also enables more students to participate in experiential and interactive learning, in service learning opportunities in their schools and communities, and in internships, all of which help keep students engaged in school and make school more relevant.

For additional time to be used most effectively, it must also work for teachers. The Act encourages the use of this time for greater teacher planning and collaboration across grades and subjects, so that teachers can work together to help their students. Today's elementary school teachers spend less than 10 percent of their time planning lessons and preparing for classes – compared to over 40 percent for their Asian counterparts. Just as it does for students, time matters for teachers, by helping them to help their students more effectively.

To assess the difference these programs will make, the TIME Act calls for a comprehensive evaluation of the programs it supports. We're still in the learning stages of expanded learning time. It's intuitive that time matters, but we're still learning what practices work best – for teachers, for students, and for schools. This evaluation will ensure that we will learn as much as possible about what works, and that the Department of Education will be able to do a better job of sharing best practices nationwide in supporting these initiatives.

Expanded learning is an idea whose time has come, thanks in large part to the leadership of Massachusetts. As John Adams wrote in the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, the education of the people is “necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties.” Ever since, Massachusetts has been ahead of the curve in education reform. In recent years, the Commonwealth has developed a significant expanded learning time initiative that enables schools to offer 300 additional hours of instruction during the school year, allocated as each school chooses. The initiative began with 10 schools in 2006. Twenty-six schools are now participating, and more than 40 are now planning to participate.

At the Edwards Middle School in Boston's Charlestown neighborhood, additional time has made a difference. The percentage of students scoring “proficient” on math tests rose almost thirteen points during its first year with expanded school hours, and the school is also offering a wide array of extracurricular activities, including Latin American Dance, Musical Theater, and valuable apprenticeship opportunities.

We know that many schools and districts around the country are seeking better ways to strengthen the support they offer parents and to deepen their connection with their communities. The No Child Left Behind Law includes requirements to develop parent-involvement policies and programs, release school report cards, and engage parents and community representatives to construct plans to improve struggling schools. The Keeping PACE Act builds on these activities to support schools in making parents and the community full partners in the education of their children.

Parents are their children's first teachers, and they have immense influence over their children's attitudes, focus, priorities and goals. Well-informed parents are more likely to be involved, to ask questions, to suggest constructive changes and to make a difference in their child's

education. They deserve to know what their children are learning and being tested on, what their children's grades and assessment scores mean, and how assessment data can be used to improve learning. Informed and engaged parents can help turn around struggling schools.

Educators have long recognized this fact, based on their own experience and abundant research. Unfortunately, a series of reports by Appleseed make clear schools and districts continue to face too many challenges that undermine the effort to achieve parental involvement. Parents may feel intimidated by language or cultural barriers, or have difficulty understanding their role as an advocate for their children. Parents too often find that the information provided by schools and districts is not released in a timely manner, is not clear and student-specific, and uses technical terms that are unfamiliar. Poor communication also often obscures the school-choice and supplemental-services options for parents under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Heather Weiss, the director of the Harvard Family Research Project, emphasizes that with the conclusive evidence now available, the time has come for action. As she states, "The question we must ask is, in addition to quality schools, what non-school learning resources should we invest in and scale up to improve educational outcomes, narrow achievement gaps, and equip our children with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the complex and global 21st century?"

To encourage greater parent involvement, this bill amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to enable States to award grants to local education agencies to assist schools in hiring and maintaining Parent and Community Outreach Coordinators. These coordinators will build vital partnerships among families, schools, and the community. They'll work with school principals, teachers, and staff to encourage parents to become more involved in their child's education and give them the tools necessary to become successful advocates for their children. Instead of giving teachers, counselors, and principals more to do, every school should have a resource they can turn to for help with identifying student needs and using community resources to help all students succeed.

Educational research also shows that students flourish in environments in which learning is a community value and in which schools have the ability to address a broad range of student needs. Many school districts have established full-service community schools that directly involve parents, families, and the entire community in education. These schools use integrated services to students to help meet multiple local needs in areas such as education, health, social services, and recreation. President Obama has recognized the power of these schools, by often citing the extraordinary success of the Harlem Children's Zone and using it as a model for his Promise Neighborhoods proposal.

Responding to this research and to success stories from around the nation, the Keeping PACE Act will help school districts do more to increase community involvement in schools, provide a wide range of support and services to children, and make schools the center of their neighborhood. The Keeping PACE Act supports incentives for local education agencies to coordinate with mayors, community-based organizations, for-profit entities, and other local partners to re-design and modernize their current school plans and facilities to link students more effectively with existing resources.

Improved coordination among parents, schools, and their communities can create networks that enable and empower students to take advantage of many more opportunities to learn, and by doing so, we will uncover innovations to help all schools.

As with the TIME Act, establishing this network will benefit not only students who need the greatest help with their learning, or who are at risk of dropping out, but also those who need more challenging schoolwork to keep them engaged and making progress.

And yet again, Massachusetts is leading the way. A current Massachusetts pilot initiative has placed 32 full-time family and community outreach coordinators in Boston public schools.

These coordinators are responsible for supporting families, teachers, and the community in a common effort to help students academically and socially, and their efforts have been successful.

For example, the Family and Community Outreach Coordinator at the Condon School in Boston has offered workshops for parents on middle school transition and math curriculum and coordinated parent participation on an anti-bullying initiative at the school, called the School Climate Committee. The Coordinator has helped teachers and parents make connections for parent-teacher conferences, bringing in over 200 parents to participate in a fall open house, in which some of the teachers have reported contact with over 80 percent of their students' families. The Coordinator has also inspired donations to the school through the generosity of local businesses.

Now is the time for the nation as a whole to make a greater effort on expanded learning and parent and community involvement. These two bills constitute a strong commitment to meet the comprehensive learning needs of children and families, guarantee a role for parents and families in local schools, and provide real hope to students most at-risk of dropping out. Addressing these challenges is essential to the future and prosperity of our nation as a whole.

We know the dimensions of the problem we face. Today, 65 percent of 12th graders do not read on grade level, and 1.2 million students who enter the ninth grade fail to receive a high school diploma four years later. We can no longer afford to pay this high price, either in terms of lost human potential or national productivity. These bills will help millions of young people reach their potential, and help make our education system the best in the world once again.

Mr. President, the Keeping PACE Act is supported by 37 organizations representing education communities. I ask unanimous consent that their letters of support be printed in the record.