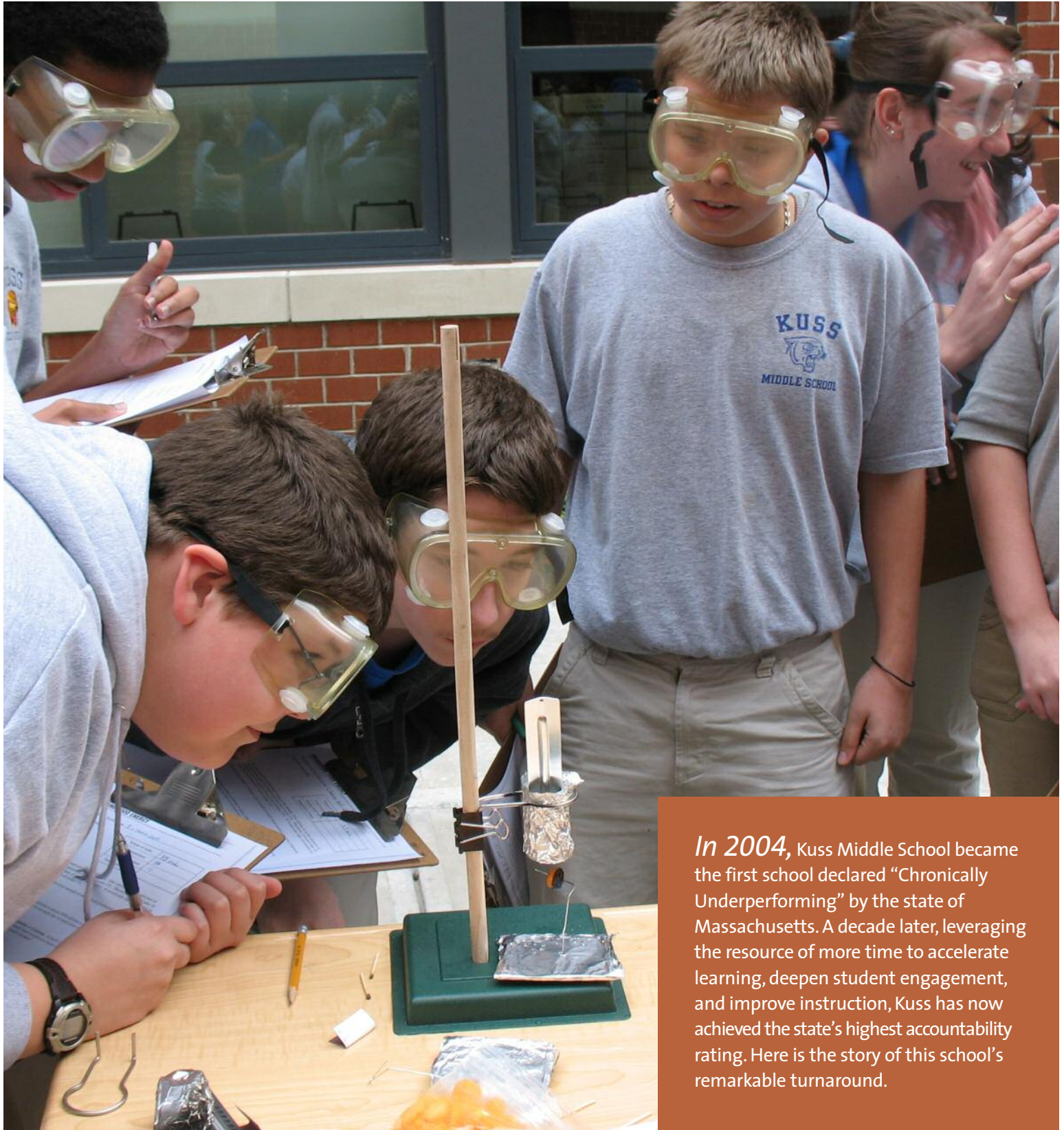


Kuss Middle School:

Expanding Time to Accelerate School Improvement
2014-2015 Update



In 2004, Kuss Middle School became the first school declared “Chronically Underperforming” by the state of Massachusetts. A decade later, leveraging the resource of more time to accelerate learning, deepen student engagement, and improve instruction, Kuss has now achieved the state’s highest accountability rating. Here is the story of this school’s remarkable turnaround.

The Story of Expanded Time in Massachusetts

Massachusetts has emerged as a leader in the national movement to add substantial time to the school schedule in order to better serve disadvantaged students and help narrow achievement and opportunity gaps. Over 130 schools across the state offer significantly more learning time for all of their students when compared to surrounding district schools. Serving a total of over 65,000 students, these “expanded-time” schools operate with an average day nearly eight hours long and most (87 percent) serve a majority low-income student population.

The rapid growth in expanded-time schools across the Commonwealth has been fueled by state and local policies that promote the adoption of more learning time as a key strategy to create high-quality schools. Chief among its efforts, Massachusetts launched in 2005 the first-in-the-nation statewide initiative to provide additional resources to traditional district schools specifically to enable them to redesign and create a substantially longer day.

The Massachusetts legislature established the Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Initiative as a competitive grant program, offering increased funding to district schools that could demonstrate how, with 300 more annual hours, they would effectively transform the education they provide. To help foster the development of robust redesign plans, the ELT Initiative provides competing schools the opportunity to engage in a 6- to 12-month planning process. Drawing upon the collaborative energies of teachers,

union leaders, community partners, administrators, and parents, school communities are able to develop an enhanced educational program that furnishes more time for academics, enrichment, and teacher collaboration. Schools qualifying for the grant are awarded \$1,300 per pupil per year. In the 2014-15 school year, 22 schools are participating.

Another notable avenue for the creation of expanded-time schools in Massachusetts, as is the case across the country, is the establishment of charter schools. Out of the total of 80 charters, 66 have longer days and/or years. Unlike many other states where the chartering process stands out as the primary means to establish an expanded-time school, however, Massachusetts educators have taken advantage of a number of other policy innovations (including the aforementioned ELT Initiative) to convert *existing* traditional district schools to ones with expanded time. (Figure 1) These pathways include: (a) the federal School Improvement Grant program that requires schools to increase learning time as part of school transformation or turnaround efforts; (b) the Lawrence Public Schools Turnaround that placed a mid-sized urban district in state receivership and granted the receiver broad powers to install major structural changes, including a substantially longer school day; and (c) the state’s Innovation Schools program that confers to qualifying district schools charter-like autonomies in up to six areas, including budgeting and scheduling.

Basic Characteristics of Massachusetts Expanded-Time Schools (2014-2015)

Total Students Served	67,159
Average % Low-Income*	70.5
Average % English Language Learner*	19.2
Average Length of Day	7.9 hours
Average Length of Year	183.7 days
Average Additional Hours Per Year **	278

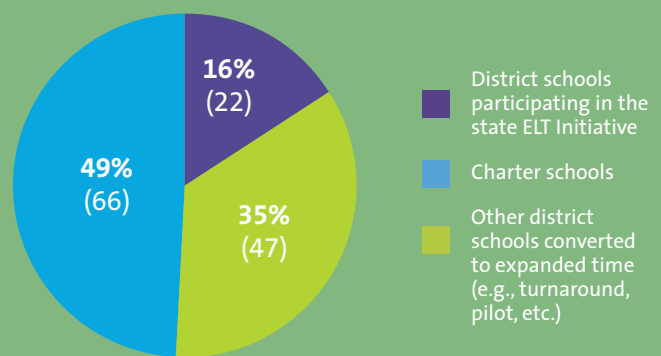
*Percent weighted by enrollment

**As compared to neighboring district schools. Total hours equal to 43 additional 6.5-hour days of school per year.

FIGURE 1

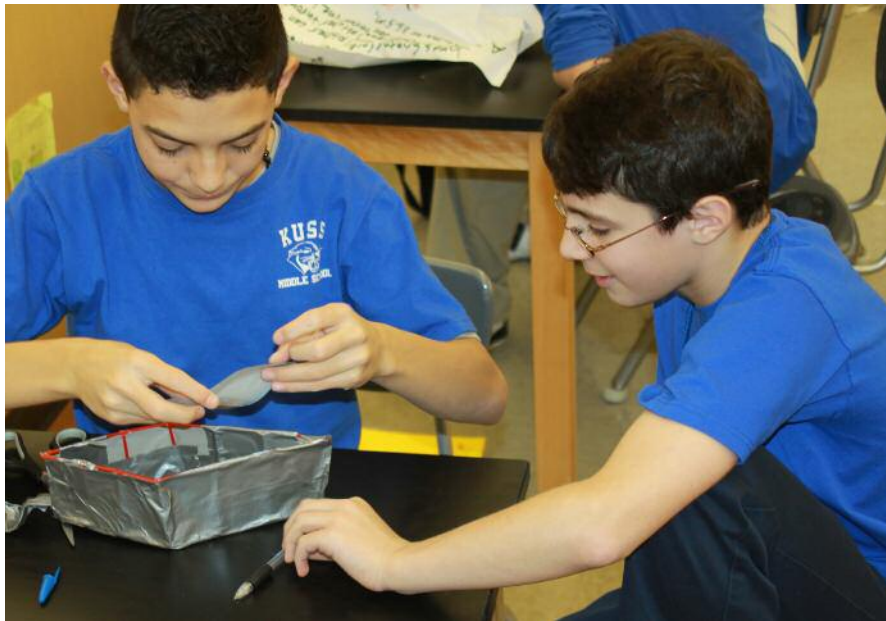
Types of Expanded-Time Schools in Massachusetts

Number of schools in parentheses, n = 135



“Kuss Middle School used to be considered a model turnaround school, but with continued refinement of our expanded learning time, now other folks consider us a model school period.”

Mike Procaccini, Kuss Principal



“More learning time has significantly increased student engagement and allowed students and staff to establish more meaningful relationships that create credibility in the classroom.”

Marc Charest, Kuss Teacher

In 2004, Kuss Middle School, located in the small city of Fall River in southeastern Massachusetts, reflected the region’s long economic decline in its tired hallways and classrooms. Student and teacher morale was low, as the school struggled with dwindling enrollment and leadership turnover. Not surprisingly, student achievement suffered, as well. Student proficiency on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) was persistently among the lowest in the state. In response, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education took the dramatic step of designating Kuss as “Chronically Underperforming,” a status that prompted greater state intervention and oversight.

Though a low-point for the school, the state takeover also ushered in a time of possibility—an opportunity to transform the school. The new district-appointed principal, a veteran educator with extensive experience in urban education, knew that moving Kuss onto a success trajectory could not be accomplished by tinkering around the edges. Instead, the school needed to break from convention and install a series of substantial reforms that would elevate instruction and push students to higher levels of learning and engagement. She recognized immediately that one of the “rate limiters” for change was the time available for learning. Confined by a six-hour school day, Kuss educators were simply not able to help students meet their performance goals in literacy and math, without sacrificing time for science, social studies, foreign languages, the arts, and athletics. And not only was the school constrained in providing a well-rounded education, but the schedule would also not allow for significant time for teachers to collaborate and plan together how to deliver a more intensive and robust education.

By chance, the Kuss efforts to drastically improve student outcomes coincided with the appearance of a new school reform opportunity in Massachusetts, the Expanded Learning Time Initiative, which would provide state funds to qualifying schools that presented solid plans to redesign their educational program with 300 more hours per year for all students. (See page 2.) A team of Kuss teachers, administrators, parents,

community partners, and representatives of the local teachers’ union convened regularly to develop such a plan, and the state awarded the school a grant to put in place a redesigned school day. In fall 2006, Kuss opened its doors with a brand new school schedule—a schedule that increased daily time for all students, providing them with a balance of personalized academic instruction and engaging enrichment, as well as additional time for teacher collaboration.

Within a few years, Kuss had made steady achievement gains and, today, continues to experience nothing short of a renaissance. Bouyed by the move to a new building in 2009, the school that once struggled to fill its classrooms and attract teachers now has a waiting list, as students and their families are drawn to the school’s culture of high achievement, superior instruction, diverse enrichment offerings, and robust science programs. It has been featured in state and national media, including *The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, CBS News, *USA Today*, and *Education Week* for its school-wide success. But the school has not rested on its laurels: Achievement climbs nearly every year, and Kuss teachers and administrators are continually seeking to improve even more.

In conjunction with expanding time, Kuss has implemented a **schoolwide instructional focus on writing**, a need they identified through ongoing analysis of student data. All staff are now trained to use common techniques to integrate writing instruction and practice into all academic and enrichment classes.

Most recently, Kuss Middle School has achieved the state’s highest accountability rank (Level 1), a designation rare among schools with a majority of its students in poverty.¹ In the last decade, Kuss has transformed itself from under-performer to top performer. It has become an exemplar of what is possible with strong leadership, a clear reform plan, and more time. Its success in both design and execution has made Kuss a leader in educational innovation and effectiveness that others can look to for inspiration and guidance.

¹ Among the 74 middle schools in Massachusetts with a student population at least 60 percent low-income, Kuss is one of only seven to achieve Level 1 status.

Expanded Learning Time at Kuss Middle School

Kuss has redesigned the school day to incorporate 300 additional hours of learning time per year for all students, offering each of its nearly 800 students a customized balance of academics and enrichment, while providing more time for teachers to work together to improve instruction and better meet student needs. Redesign components include:

1. More time for core academics, personalized instruction, and individualized support. All Kuss students have daily, 90-minute blocks for English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science, while social studies is taught daily in 45-minute blocks. In addition to core science instruction, all sixth and seventh graders participate in applied science electives, choosing from options like DesignLab, Project Go-Green and Astronomy, while eighth graders benefit from a 20-week course to review content for the state science and technology assessment.

Kuss has also built in a structure for reteaching and remediation for struggling students. Initially, the system involved designated periods for all students, but, as more and more of them have become proficient in ELA and math, the school has targeted extra support—above and beyond the substantial in-class time—only to those most in need of additional learning time in these core subjects. These students work directly with their classroom teacher, who knows their strengths and needs best, and so that they can coordinate the targeted assistance with the whole-class curriculum.

2. More time for engaging enrichment programming where students develop interests and gain mastery in specialized subjects. All Kuss students participate in two kinds of enrichment programming during their school day: (a) a rotation of standard specialty classes offered to all (gym, music, visual arts, and technology); and (b) mixed-grade electives in one of five categories (PE/health, STEM, arts, humanities, and communications), where students choose from a menu of classes each semester, rotating through at least one in each category throughout their Kuss careers. Options in the electives include video production, martial arts and an award-winning theater arts program. Most courses culminate in a final product, performance, or presentation,

where students demonstrate what they have learned to peers, families, and the Fall River community. Electives are taught primarily by Kuss teachers, with community partners such as the YMCA and the SMILES mentoring program supplementing faculty expertise. Enrichment programming—whether through partners or Kuss staff—is integrated throughout the school day, instead of being tacked on to the end of the school day or after school.

3. More time for teacher collaboration to strengthen instruction. Kuss teachers meet at least three times per week to collaborate—a total of almost 2.5 hours. One of these 45-minute meetings is reserved for subject-area teams, so that teachers can plan lessons and craft curricula together. In another session, teachers meet in grade-level, mixed-subject teams, to discuss needs of specific students. During these periods, teachers analyze student assessment data and examine student work to determine which students may need additional support and in which particular topics. Teachers also meet once per week in larger units called School Improvement Teams to address school-wide issues like discipline or cross-curricular instructional methods (e.g., “Do Nows” or “Accountable Talk”). In addition to meeting as teams, teachers will also use these periods to observe one another in classrooms.

Over the years, as the faculty has become more intentional about delivering high-quality instruction, many veteran Kuss teachers have become internal experts, fully capable of leading training and executing innovative instructional methods. Teachers also have the opportunity to participate in and lead a number of school-wide committees, such as the Redesign Team, which oversees the ongoing improvement of the expanded school day, and the School Climate & Culture Team, which crafted a new student support plan.

Sample Student Schedule: Kuss Middle School

	Monday	Tuesday*	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday*
7:15-8:04	ELA	Social studies	Phys. Ed.	Science	Art studio
8:06-8:51		Phys. Ed.	Math		
8:53-9:38	Social studies	Web design	Science	ELA	Music
9:40-10:25	Health	Creative writing			ELA
10:29-11:14	Math	Math	ELA	Social Studies	Social Studies
11:16-11:38	Lunch				
11:40-12:28	Science	Math	ELA	Math	Math
12:30-1:15		Science	Math games	Fun with rockets	
1:17-2:02	Technology	ELA	Trash to treasures	Let's celebrate	Technology
2:04-2:49	Art studio		Social studies	Art	Science
2:51-3:35		Math	Math	Art	

■ Core academics ■ STEM elective ■ Elective ■ Required special

*On Tuesdays and Fridays, each block is shortened to 41 minutes (from the standard 45 minutes) to accommodate the inclusion of a 25-minute Advisory period at the beginning of the day.

“In our math clusters, we help each other to get the right answers by talking through the solutions together. I learn better when I move at the pace that works best for me and can get lots of feedback from my teacher.”

Samantha Penacho, Kuss Student

Results

Since first adding time and embarking on their transformation, Kuss has seen dramatic improvements in a number of key academic measures. Highlights include:

✓ **School-wide gains in math and English Language Arts.**

Between 2006 and 2014, Kuss has increased the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on MCAS by 38 points in math and by 33 points in English Language Arts (ELA). (See Figures 2 and 3.)

✓ **Narrowing the achievement gap, especially in math.**

In so doing, the school has narrowed the proficiency gap with the state in math from 30 points to 3, and in ELA from 37 points to 9. Among eighth graders, Kuss students have, since 2010, essentially pulled even with (or exceeded) state proficiency rates in math (See Figure 4.) Further, compared to other low-income students across the state, the more disadvantaged Kuss students exceed proficiency rates in both math and ELA.

✓ **Enhanced Science Proficiency.** In 2006, a mere 9 percent of Kuss eighth graders were scoring proficient on the state’s science assessment. In 2014, the percentage now exceeds that of the state.

Like all strong schools, Kuss also looks at other measures to gauge their progress and assess the impact of expanding time, including:

✓ **Increased enrollment.** Enrollment at Kuss has grown from a low of 480 before ELT to 745 in the 2014-2015 school year, making it the largest of Fall River’s three middle schools.

Further, the district maintains a waiting list of other students who wish to transfer into Kuss.

✓ **High rates of attendance, low rates of misbehavior.**

Attendance has increased to a daily rate of over 94 percent, while, at the same time, there has been a marked decline in suspension rates over the last few years.

✓ **Stronger partnerships.** More time has helped Kuss forge deep community partnerships, which bring additional programs and resources into the school day. Key partners include the YMCA, UMass, Harvard University, and the SMILES mentoring program. A number of these partners also serve Kuss students after the 3:30pm dismissal and during the summer.

FIGURE 2

Percent of Kuss Students Scoring Proficient on State Assessments (MCAS) Grade 6–8, English Language Arts

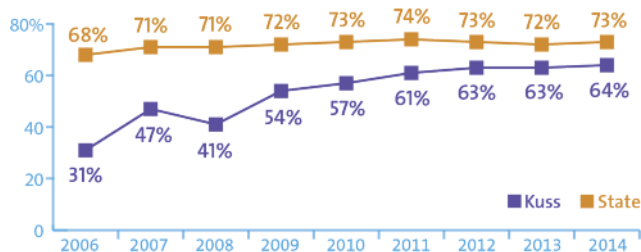


FIGURE 3

Percent of Kuss Students Scoring Proficient on State Assessments (MCAS) Grade 6–8, Mathematics

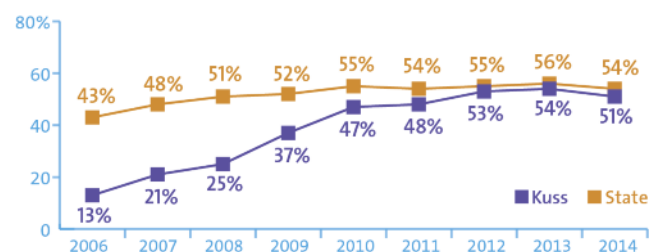


FIGURE 4

Percent of Kuss Students Scoring Proficient on State Assessments (MCAS) Grade 8, Mathematics

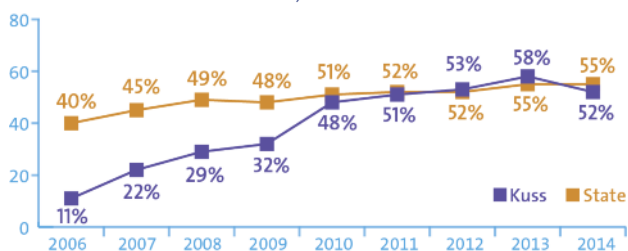
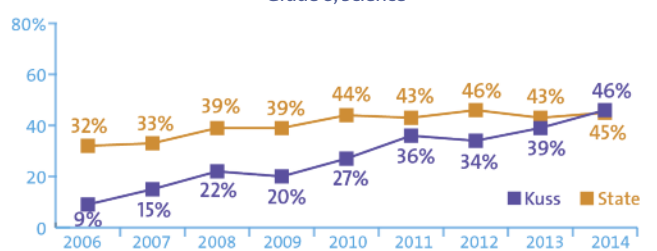


FIGURE 5

Percent of Kuss Students Scoring Proficient on State Assessments (MCAS) Grade 8, Science



Other Essential Components of the Successful Transformation of Kuss Middle School

- **Diverse stakeholder support.** In expanding the school day, Kuss built support among district and union leaders, community partners, families, and teachers at the school. Kuss teachers work the full eight-hour school day and are compensated accordingly. The shift in school culture came about as the whole faculty bought in to the need for expanded time to support their students' learning and their own professional growth..
- **Strong, distributive leadership.** Over the last 10 years, Kuss has benefited from stable and visionary leadership. Both the Kuss principal appointed in 2004, Nancy Mullen, and the current one who has been at the school since 2012, Michael Procaccini, have brought a laser-like focus to maximizing learning time. The principals each have built a leadership team that shares responsibilities, ranging from teacher training and evaluation to grant writing and partnership management.
- **Talented teachers.** After a flurry of new staff arrivals in the initial years of Kuss's turnaround, the school now boasts a large corps of highly-effective, experienced teachers.

Turnover is low, especially because support for new and veteran teachers is strong and the faculty values collaboration and continuous improvement. Further, among those who have been at the school longest, many have taken on leadership roles both within the school and beyond.

- **District champions.** Kuss has had the support of two consecutive superintendents who appreciate how expanded time can be leveraged to support significant school improvement. Based on the success at Kuss, district leadership prioritized expanded time so intently that, using federal, state, and district funds, they have now installed an expanded-time model in a total of seven of the district's schools, the original three of which have each attained Level 1 status.
- **State-of-the-art facilities.** In 2009, Kuss moved into a new building equipped with a modern auditorium, library, nine science labs, two gymnasiums, and other amenities that support their redesigned day. The new building signals to students, faculty, and families that Fall River is investing in providing a top-notch education to every student.



“The expanded learning time allows children to learn continuously through hands-on activities. Not only does this reinforce their book work, it really engages them in school. And Kuss itself is not just a school, but a community with very dedicated staff and deep parent involvement.”

Dawn Oliver, Kuss Parent

Growing Momentum for More Time

Over the last few years, an ever-growing number of both policymakers and practitioners have come to the conclusion that our nation will fail to meet our ambitious goals for educational success while schools still operate within the confines of the conventional school calendar of 180 6.5-hour days. By expanding the school schedule and calendar—and optimizing learning time within these expanded days and years—schools will be much better poised to boost student performance, deepen student engagement through a well-rounded education, and strengthen instruction by providing teachers more time to collaborate to foster improved practice.

This recognition of the power of more time to narrow achievement and opportunity gaps has spurred policymakers to create more avenues through which district schools might find it easier to break from the traditional (and antiquated) schedule. In turn, more and more practitioners are taking advantage of these policy flexibilities and

funding opportunities to expand learning time and redesign their school days and years to deliver a more robust and individualized education to all students. At last count, the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) has identified over 2,000 schools that have expanded their school time meaningfully beyond the norm.

The movement is encouraged by the growing recognition that students, especially those living in poverty, need more time in school in order to achieve to the same level as their more affluent peers. Increased learning time is a long-term reform strategy that requires careful planning, effective leadership, and thoughtful implementation, school by school. NCTL urges states, districts, and schools considering the use of expanded time as a strategy to transform schools to consider the following lessons learned from Kuss Middle School and other high-performing expanded-time schools around the country.

Guiding Principles for Expanding Learning Time

- **Add significantly more learning time for ALL students in targeted schools** by rethinking how the entire day and year are structured to improve student achievement, increase student engagement, and furnish teachers with opportunities for collaboration and professional development
- **Maximize the effectiveness of new and existing time** through a school-wide effort to strengthen instruction, based on analysis of data, and an intense focus on a small number of key performance and instructional goals
- **Capitalize on increased learning time by using data to individualize instruction and provide tiered support**, grouping students based on like-needs and frequently monitoring progress to adjust groupings, content, and instructional strategies accordingly
- **Prioritize more time with quality teaching when allocating resources** by first determining how much additional student learning time is needed to raise the achievement of all students, then thinking strategically about how to support it through a variety of staffing and scheduling models
- **Maintain focus and adopt a continuous improvement mindset** because transforming a school typically takes place over the course of several years, and thus, leaders and other stakeholders alike must continually work together to overcome the myriad challenges that will inevitably arise



“The district of Fall River is strongly committed to providing expanded learning time for our students and teachers because we have seen up close how Kuss Middle School has leveraged more time to drive school improvement. Fall River now boasts seven schools with substantially more time and we are proud to support each one in their impressive efforts to continually raise the quality of education.”

Meg Mayo-Brown, Fall River Superintendent

The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) and its state affiliate Massachusetts 2020 are dedicated to expanding learning time to narrow the achievement gap and provide a well-rounded education for all children. Massachusetts 2020 focuses its efforts to support expanded-time schools in Massachusetts and leads the country's first statewide initiative to redesign public schools by adding significantly more learning time to the school day and year. NCTL is the leading national organization focused on the impact of time on learning outcomes. NCTL conducts research and advances public policy at the federal, state, and local levels and provides direct technical assistance to a growing number of states, districts, and schools that seek to expand learning time to prepare students for success in college and careers.



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