

CASE STUDY:

Technical Assistance Program for Massachusetts Districts and Schools Expanding Learning Time

Overview

The leadership and staff of the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) have deep experience in helping states, districts and schools rethink the traditional school day and year in order to provide students a well rounded education that prepares them for success in college and the workforce. The areas of technical assistance support include, at the state level: (1) building political and policy leadership to support expand learning time; (2) developing a media and communications strategy to help make the case for the reform; and (3) crafting a legislative and budget agenda. At the district and school levels the NCTL team has expertise in: (1) setting a new vision - redesigning school schedules to impact student outcomes; (2) labor-management negotiations; (3) addressing barriers to adding additional time; and (4) building school partnerships to expand learning opportunities.

Case Study of Massachusetts Regional Technical Assistance Institutes

Over 21 districts and 65 schools throughout Massachusetts are working to implement the Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Initiative in school year 2008-2009. To support such a large number of schools throughout the state, the leaders and staff of the National Center on Time & Learning developed a technical assistance strategy for the 2008 cohort of schools that involves intensive coaching and training through regional training institutes.

The cornerstone of the technical assistance program is a series of periodic planning sessions held throughout the state. Districts and their participating school planning managers attend planning sessions in one of four regional cohorts. Planning sessions are 5-6 hours in length and are held in a location that is easily accessible by all members of the regional cohort. Sessions combine presentations by expert staff and practitioners on relevant areas with small breakout sessions where districts work in small groups on planning tasks. The sessions cover key steps in the planning process and address issues districts and schools are facing.

Between planning sessions, participating districts complete a designated set of tasks. Districts prepare materials to present at the planning sessions and receive feedback from other districts and from expert staff. Each regional cohort is assigned an experienced consultant who will provide coaching and assistance during the planning sessions and between them on an as needed basis.

District & School Staffing

Each district assigned one person to be the district-level planning manager and one person from each participating school to be a school planning manager. These district-level and school-level planning managers are in charge of the planning process for their district and school, conveying information back to their colleagues and generally facilitating all aspects of the local planning

effort. The district-level manager and the planning managers from each participating school attend the regional technical assistance sessions. District level planning managers work closely with the school level planning managers in between meetings to help make sure the district team makes appropriate progress on planning.

Planning Process & Calendar

February 2007

Planning Session #1

Topics Covered:

- The ELT Opportunity: what existing ELT schools have done with the additional time
- Timeline and steps needed to launch an effective planning process
- Creating a communications strategy to build buy-in and support
- Using school and student data to determine priorities for ELT

March - April 2007

- Phone calls with each district manager/ facilitator to discuss communications challenges
- District and school teams launch planning efforts, communicating with key stakeholders and conducting a needs assessment to identify educational priorities for ELT
- School and district leaders visit existing ELT schools

May 2007

Planning Session # 2

Topics Covered:

- Schools present on results of needs assessments and priorities for ELT, opportunity for feedback and small group break-out sessions
- Review of steps and lessons learned in forging agreements between district management and teacher's unions
- Discussion and brainstorming on common challenges
- Review of requirements for preliminary plans

June - September 2007

- Schools and districts develop preliminary plans (to meet August DOE deadline)
- Consultants support schools and help resolve key issues

October 2007

Planning Session #3

Topics Covered:

- Transitioning to longer learning blocks - making use of additional time in core academics
- Models of effective enrichment programs - linking enrichment to standards

- Forging partnerships with community based organizations
- Review of some school redesign plans

November - December 2007

- Districts and schools prepare final submission to DOE
- Consultants and staff review draft proposals and provide comments/feedback to help districts improve
- Districts work to secure union agreements

January 2008

- Districts notified by DOE
- Consultants help districts and schools get ready for implementation planning

Planning Session # 4

Topics Covered:

- Making use of additional time for common planning and professional development
- Implementation planning: creating detailed budgets, schedules and staffing plans
- Coming to final agreements on compensation with teachers associations

March - April 2008

- Workplans revised
- Consultants check in periodically with district and school planning managers on progress through visits, phone calls and e-mails
- Consultants work with districts to troubleshoot problems or overcome obstacles
- E-mails to remind districts of key action steps they may want to be taking

May 2008

Planning Session # 5

Topics Covered:

- Sharing ideas and brainstorming on common challenges
- Steps for gaining deeper support and buy-in from teachers
- Discussion on special education students and ELT
- Finalizing curricula for new and/or expanded courses
- ELT Finances - creating a complete program budget

June - August 2008

- Schools and districts continue to work on implementation planning and prepare for start of school
- Schools convene summer planning teams
- Consultants continue to provide assistance as needed and monitor progress