

Time for Teachers

Leveraging Expanded Time to Strengthen Instruction and Empower Teachers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



While the magnitude and pace of reforms in American education have accelerated significantly over the last several years, one fact remains constant: There is no stronger in-school influence on student performance than one's teacher.¹

Time for Teachers: Leveraging Expanded Time to Strengthen Instruction and Empower Teachers, from the National Center on Time & Learning, looks deeply inside effective teacher development practices at 17 high-performing and rapidly-improving schools across the country. These schools are part of a national movement to expand learning time. Now totaling over 1,500 nationally, expanded-time schools add hundreds of hours of learning time per year for students in academic classes and in enrichment activities to boost achievement and provide a more well-rounded education. The positive effects of these additional learning opportunities, particularly for students from low-income communities, have been well documented. Yet, students are not the only beneficiaries. The expanded school days and/or years can also increase learning opportunities for teachers, who have more time to collaborate with their peers

and master new content, plan for and reflect on lessons, and hone instructional practices.

Across diverse settings, *Time for Teachers* schools are leveraging an expanded schedule, not only to advance student learning but also to support teachers' professional growth. Unlike most schools across the country, where teachers spend the vast majority of their time in school engaged in direct instruction, these educators strategically set aside significant time for teachers to work collaboratively with their peers to plan for and strengthen instruction.

Time for Teachers schools offer lessons for policymakers and practitioners as they confront the substantial changes taking shape today in the teaching profession. These changes, which include more rigorous educational standards in most states, new teacher evaluation systems, and a demographic shift to a younger, less experienced teaching core, require a renewed focus on how our nation's schools invest in teacher time.

About the Report

Time for Teachers explores the ways in which an expanded schedule creates opportunities for schools to invest in six teacher development practices:

- (a) collaborative lesson planning
- (b) embedded professional development
- (c) summer training
- (d) data analysis
- (e) individualized coaching
- (f) peer observation

These practices are summarized briefly on pages 4 and 5, and in much greater depth in the full report, which includes examples and vignettes from the 17 schools, and extensive guidance for districts and schools looking to improve their professional development programs. As educators interviewed for the report attest, additional time is a lever that allows them to collaborate without sacrificing instructional time. That said, the practices described in the report are transferrable to schools with conventional schedules that are looking to improve how they are using existing time in their school day.

Three overarching themes emerge from these practices across the *Time for Teachers* schools — themes that reinforce what other effective-practices research on teacher development has revealed. These themes have important implications for how practitioners and policymakers organize and optimize time for teacher development.

- **Professional culture matters.** Educators share a commitment to continuous improvement. Teachers and administrators embrace feedback, reflect openly on challenges, and value the input and ideas of their colleagues. School leaders work to create a climate that fosters professional growth.
- **Teachers are leaders.** Teachers serve as mentors and coaches for their colleagues, lead team meetings, design curricula, model instructional practices, and share their expertise. All teachers are deeply invested in strengthening instruction, not only in their classrooms but across the whole school.
- **The school is the locus of learning.** Professional development efforts are school-directed, strategically designed to meet the needs of teachers and students, and driven by school-wide instructional goals. The variety of activities are complementary, synergistic, and embedded in practice.

TABLE 1. Schools featured in *Time for Teachers*

School Name	Location	School Type	Grades	Students*	% Low Income*	Hours/Year*
Achievement First Amistad High School	New Haven, CT	Charter	9-12	373	75%	1,511
Biltmore Preparatory Academy	Phoenix, AZ	Traditional district	K-8	386	49%	1,326
Brunson-Lee Elementary School	Phoenix, AZ	Traditional district	K-6	510	93%	1,320
Douglas MacArthur Girls' Leadership Academy	Cleveland, OH	Traditional district	PK-8	320	100%	1,425
Frank M. Silvia Elementary School	Fall River, MA	Traditional district	PK-5	810	71%	1,485
KIPP Central City Academy	New Orleans, LA	Charter	5-8	434	97%	1,530
Mastery Charter School - Shoemaker Campus	Philadelphia, PA	Charter	6-12	721	82%	1,307
McGlone Elementary School	Denver, CO	Traditional district	K-5	686	97%	1,440
Morton School of Excellence	Chicago, IL	Traditional district	PK-8	403	98%	1,267
Newton Elementary School	Greenfield, MA	Traditional district	K-3	218	78%	1,380
Nicholas S. LaCorte-Peterstown School No. 3	Elizabeth, NJ	Traditional district	K-8	658	95%	1,485
The Preuss School	La Jolla, CA	Charter	6-12	846	93%	1,352
Roxbury Prep, Lucy Stone Campus	Boston, MA	Charter	5-7	240	80%	1,375
The Soulsville Charter School	Memphis, TN	Charter	6-12	531	81%	1,503
UP Academy Charter School	Boston, MA	Charter	6-8	460	87%	1,412
Williamsburg Collegiate Charter School	Brooklyn, NY	Charter	5-8	315	83%	1,554
YES College Prep - Southwest Campus	Houston, TX	Charter	6-12	808	85%	1,413

*from most recent data available, as of March 2014

About the Practices

Collaborative Lesson Planning

Improving Teaching through Teamwork

Nearly all of the 17 profiled schools are leveraging their expanded schedules to provide structured opportunities for teachers to plan lessons together. Teachers in these schools spend on average more than 90 minutes per week working in teams to plan lessons; in some schools they collaborate up to four hours every week. These educators report that by investing time in collaborative lesson planning, they are raising the quality and rigor of instruction because lessons are designed by a team of experts who each bring varying and often complementary skills and experience to the process.

Keys to Success

- Clear, Meaningful Goals and Deliverables
- Structures to Support Planning
- Leadership Support and Guidance
- Results-focused Facilitation
- Professional Respect

“The more that teachers plan and talk about what it is we’re asking our kids to do, the better the teaching will be.”

Faith Burtamekh, Principal
Biltmore Preparatory Academy
Phoenix, AZ



Embedded Professional Development

Building Knowledge through Collaboration

Through school-wide workshops and team-based professional learning communities, teachers at the featured schools are spending substantial time with their colleagues reflecting on instructional strategies and learning new ways to strengthen their teaching. Unlike traditional professional development (often led by external experts and/or held outside the school), these embedded learning opportunities are highly connected to school-based instructional goals and engage teachers as experts in active, peer-to-peer learning.

Keys to Success

- Focused Use of Time
- Content Driven by School Goals
- Peer-to-Peer Learning
- Differentiation of Content

“These sessions have built a real sense of trust and teamwork among the teachers.”

Ted Panagopoulos, District Instructional Coach
Elizabeth Public Schools
Elizabeth, NJ



Summer Training

Establishing Expectations and Planning Ahead

Summer training helps schools lay the groundwork for the deep collaboration that takes place during the school year. Every summer, for two to three weeks before students arrive, 7 of the 17 profiled schools convene their faculty for intensive planning and professional development. (Other schools in this study offer their teachers up to one week of summer training.) At these summer sessions, teachers have significant time to collaborate on instruction, build a common understanding of their school's vision and mission, and learn about new tools and systems they will use throughout the course of the academic year.

Keys to Success

- A Foundation for Ongoing Collaboration
- Aligned Expectations and Practices
- Tailored Support for New Teachers
- Teachers as Experts
- An Integrated Calendar of Development

“Our summer prep is terribly important. We all get to practice, plan, and gear up for the year ahead.”

Ashley Herring, Dean of Students
Roxbury Prep, Lucy Stone Campus
Boston, MA



Data Analysis

Examining Student Performance to Tailor Instruction

Data permeates teachers' instruction, planning, and collaboration at each of the schools in this study. By spending time each week systematically collecting, analyzing, and planning around data, teachers at *Time for Teachers* schools are continuously identifying ways to better meet student needs. Through regular data meetings and periodic “data days”—entire days when students do not have classes and teachers meet to analyze and respond to data from recent benchmark assessments — teachers identify student learning gaps and create action plans to address these gaps.

Keys to Success

- Leadership Commitment to Data
- High-Quality Assessments
- Effective Supports for Analysis
- Meaningful Action Steps

“We can only see how well our students are doing when we look closely at their work and their assessments.”

RaStar West, Fourth-Grade Teacher
Morton School of Excellence
Chicago, IL



Individualized Coaching

Helping Teachers Succeed through Observation and Feedback

At many profiled schools, individual teachers are paired with an instructional coach who supports their ongoing development through weekly observations and feedback. The coaching process is often cyclical—starting with the submission of the upcoming week’s lesson plans to the coach. The coach then reviews and provides written feedback on the lesson plans, and the teacher makes modifications. At least once every week, the coach observes a class and then meets with the teacher to discuss how the lessons are going, provide instructional feedback, and identify concrete action steps with the teacher for the following week’s lesson.

Keys to Success

- A Culture of Continuous Improvement
- Training and Support for Coaches
- Focused, Individualized Goals
- Timely, “Bite-sized” Action Steps
- Collaborative Problem-solving

“I would never be where I am today if it weren’t for the feedback I have gotten regularly from my coach.”

Claire Hollis, Pre-Calculus Teacher
Achievement First Amistad High School
New Haven, CT



Peer Observation

Sharing and Honing Effective Practices

Recognizing the influential role peer observation can play in improving instruction, leaders at many *Time for Teachers* schools are creating opportunities for teachers to observe one another in their classrooms. These educators agree that non-evaluative peer observations help enhance their skills and share effective practices. Through peer observation, teachers work to improve a specific instructional practice or classroom management routine by watching and debriefing with one another.

Keys to Success

- A Culture of Trust and Collaboration
- Connections to Other Professional Learning
- Focus on Specific Instructional Practices
- Protocols that Support Reflection and Growth

“When people observe me, I really think about my practice. It’s a learning opportunity for me, too.”

Christine Carvalho, Fourth-Grade Teacher
Frank M. Silvia Elementary School
Fall River, MA



Recommendations

From both a policy and a practice perspective, one of America's most vital education challenges is to ensure that each and every classroom is led by an excellent educator. To realize this ambitious goal, we must acknowledge that a successful teaching force spends time not only teaching, but also collaborating, planning, leading, and learning. The challenge for policymakers and practitioners, therefore, is three-fold: to implement robust, effective professional development systems; to empower teachers to continually strengthen their instruction; and to ensure that teachers' schedules and job expectations prioritize time for their professional learning and development.

Beyond describing the explicit ways that successful schools are investing in high-quality professional learning, *Time for Teachers* also identifies a set of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to strengthen and better support teacher learning.

For Policymakers

- 1. Advance policies that enable schools to implement an expanded school schedule that offers teachers additional time for professional learning.** Teachers working in schools with conventional schedules often struggle to find the time they need to work with colleagues, coaches, and administrators to plan, reflect, and improve their practice. An expanded school day and/or year provides more time overall for student learning and enables schools to expand time for teachers' professional development. The *Time for Teachers* schools are better able to carve out dedicated time for teachers to collaborate, such as when students are engaged in enrichment activities with other staff members or partner organizations.
- 2. Incentivize and fund high-quality, school-embedded professional learning opportunities.** In most school districts across the country, professional development incentives and funding focus on courses, workshops, and sessions with external experts. Too often, this approach overlooks the tremendous value of job-embedded and teacher-led professional learning opportunities, such as individualized coaching, peer observation, collaborative planning, and professional learning communities. Policymakers need to consider how policies and resources can better support the full range of learning taking place in the schools documented in this report.
- 3. Support job-embedded professional development as part of the training for the Common Core.** National survey data shows that most efforts to train teachers on these more rigorous standards are limited to one- or two-day workshops. Meanwhile, teachers need ongoing, job-embedded learning opportunities like the practices featured in *Time for Teachers* to effectively teach to these more complex standards. Policymakers at all levels need to consider how they can encourage and support collaborative professional learning to ensure effective Common Core implementation.
- 4. Integrate and emphasize teacher feedback and development in new evaluation systems.** Policymakers should strive to ensure that new evaluation systems, which are emerging across the country to comply with new state regulations, provide teachers with opportunities for frequent and constructive feedback, along with clear action steps—not just evaluation ratings. As district leaders continue to design these systems, they must support the training of school administrators on how to leverage evaluations as a professional development tool and a starting point for conversations about instructional improvement.
- 5. Incentivize and fund efforts at the school and district levels to support and retain new teachers.** Given the large numbers of new teachers entering the field, programs that support these beginning professionals must become a high priority for policymakers and practitioners alike. Policymakers can direct resources to mentoring or induction programs—funding not just the training itself, but also the time needed for veteran and new teachers to give and receive coaching.



For Practitioners

- 1. Assess current professional development practices and teacher time use.** Administrators and faculty can start by examining how teachers at their school currently spend their time—including time for classes, individual preparation, and other duties. Based on this data, school leaders can work to find additional time within the existing schedule for professional development and identify opportunities to better use the time already allocated for this purpose.
- 2. Consider program models that enable additional time for teacher collaboration.** We encourage school leaders to rethink the existing school schedule and consider new approaches to scheduling that might open up opportunities for teacher collaboration and development. Program models such as technology-based learning labs or enrichment activities led by partners or specialist teachers can free teachers to participate in professional learning during the school day.
- 3. Align benchmark assessments, standards, and curricula, and share relevant, timely data with teachers.** For teachers to be most effective, they must have a deep understanding of each of their student's strengths and challenges. For this reason, teachers need ready access to regular student performance data. *Across Time for Teachers* schools, timely, high-quality assessment data is a prerequisite for thoughtful planning and reflection.
- 4. Support the development of a cadre of instructional leaders and coaches in schools.** Schools need to create a team of instructional leaders and coaches. These individuals can take on a full array of responsibilities to support and strengthen teacher development: facilitating team meetings, designing and delivering workshops on targeted topics,

A successful teaching force spends time not only teaching, but also collaborating, planning, leading, and learning.

establishing processes for analyzing and responding to student data, conducting classroom observations, and providing actionable instructional feedback.

- 5. Expand opportunities for teachers to develop and share expertise.** Empowering teachers with opportunities to lead and support their peers positively impacts both instruction and school culture. Districts and networks can encourage school leaders to identify teachers who can take on new roles, such as leading workshops on instructional strategies, coaching their fellow teachers, and opening up their classrooms for observation. Districts and collective bargaining units can also work together to develop a compensation system for teacher leaders.

End Notes

¹ For an effective summary of the research, see Eric A. Hanushek, Steven G. Rivkin, "Generalizations about Using Value-Added Measures of Teacher Quality," *American Economic Review*, May 2010, 100:2, pp. 267-271.

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators* (Paris: Author, 2011), Table D 4.1. The international average for countries reporting data is 67 percent. Also see Linda Darling-Hammond, et al, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*, (Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council, 2009), pp. 15-18.



The National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) is dedicated to expanding learning time to improve student achievement and enable a well-rounded education. Through research, public policy, and technical assistance, NCTL supports national, state, and local initiatives that add significantly more school time to help children meet the demands of the 21st century and prepare for success in college and careers.

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