

## Challenge Four: Student Time

### STUDENT TIME

In July 2013, the U.S. Department of Education and seven co-sponsoring organizations<sup>1</sup> convened administrators from state education agencies and school districts and leaders from state and local teacher union affiliates to address the following question: *How can collective bargaining agreements and other joint policies and structures create flexibility in the student school day, week and year so that students are supported and advanced in real-time based on demonstrated competencies as supported by college- and career-ready (CCR) standards?*

The discussion these leaders had demonstrated that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges presented by the question. In fact, the group considered several solutions before settling on two for deeper exploration.

The group's first solution calls for extending the school day to provide increased supports for student learning. The second solution, potentially an enabling tactic for the first, calls for the use of technology to personalize student learning, which would be accompanied by new and more flexible staffing models. The two related solutions share a common aim: to accelerate the pace of student learning and close achievement gaps by more strategically using existing or expanding student learning time.

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<sup>1</sup> Convening co-sponsors included the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Education Association (NEA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the National School Boards Association (NSBA), the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), and the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

The solutions group concluded that school districts and schools, backed by collaborative efforts of labor and management, might choose to pursue one or both of the proposed solutions in no particular order. Whatever course selected, group members suggested that both solutions represent a significant shift in current practice and thinking about how to construct a school day. As a result, the solutions group agreed that district and union leadership, along with external stakeholders, would need to make a significant commitment to rethinking student learning time and enacting these solutions at the school level. Doing so, the solutions team agreed, could significantly impact student mastery of the CCR standards in these schools.

**SOLUTION 1: Extending the school day to target supports to individual student needs and maximize student learning.**

**SOLUTION 2: Using technology to personalize learning for *all* students.**

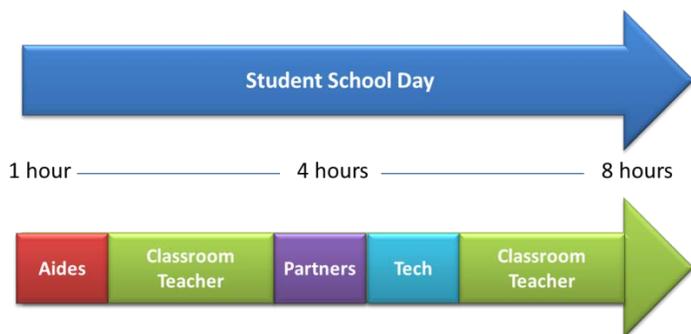
This brief provides a close look at the two solutions while highlighting others the group did not discuss in depth. For each of the two solutions, it examines steps necessary for implementation, identifies possible barriers to success and describes what success might look like, all suggested by the solutions group.

### Solution 1: Extending the School Day to Target Supports and Maximize Student Learning

Solution one asks schools to create and then use extended learning time to target specific supports to students to maximize their opportunities for learning. But students are not the sole beneficiary of this restructuring effort. The solutions group concluded that as schools extend and restructure the school day, labor and management should agree to strategically use other staff and resources – in addition to teachers – throughout the course of that day. This includes paraprofessionals, aides, community partners and technology at designated times. Using additional personnel and technology, noted the solutions group, could allow schools to stagger the start and end times of the teaching staff and partners so that the school day is longer for students but not necessarily teachers. Use of partners and technology could also create more opportunities for collaborative professional learning and planning time, the team decided.

Figure 1 illustrates how the model might work.

Figure 1



While teachers would benefit from these structural changes so too would students – and in a significant way, group members argued. They noted that the extended day should be a mix of individualized enrichment and tutoring or other academic activities, such as hands-on learning opportunities that augment

### ***Promising Solutions for Future Exploration***

In addition to discussing two solutions in depth, the group identified four additional promising solutions to extend student learning time.

#### **Solution: Expand early childhood (0-5 years old).**

- Pre-school programs should be better funded and integrated into the K-12 learning environment and school districts where their children will matriculate.

#### **Solution: Extend the school year.**

- A balanced calendar approach, for example, allows for an earlier start time in the fall and periodic breaks throughout the year for credit recovery and targeted interventions or enrichment for students.

#### **Solution: Group students using a competency-based model.**

- School systems should move away from the traditional grouping of students by age and toward one that organizes students by ability and enables them to progress as they meet key benchmarks tied to the standards, regardless of age.

#### **Solution: Better address social/emotional needs of students.**

- For student learning time to be maximized, school systems need to provide the proper wrap-around services to address the individual social and emotional needs of students.

the curriculum or increased time on core academic content. The extended day would engage students in formal learning opportunities delivered by teachers, partners or through technology platforms and learning labs in particular, supporting and advancing the individual needs and interests of students. The solutions group stressed that these opportunities should be directly tied to the CCR standards. This blended approach, the group suggested, would be especially helpful for those students who require targeted academic interventions.

Finally, the solutions group recommended that school-level decision makers should determine the schedules and staffing models necessary to support an extended day. A district, however, might decide to pilot extended day programming in a few schools and then scale the model up over time.

## What Steps Are Necessary To Extend the School Day?

To set this initiative in motion, district and union leadership must be prepared to work closely and collaboratively over an extended period of time. Getting this done, suggested some solutions group members, will require careful coordination and long-term dedication.

The solutions group members agreed that, where applicable, a contract waiver process should be developed through a district-wide joint labor-management committee. This committee should be charged with setting general principles and parameters for enabling school-based decisions on the structure of the school day and class scheduling. In addition, the joint labor-management committee will need to address compensation for any additional hours worked by staff. Where allowable, urged some members of the group, the committee should have

authority to operate as a governing body, rather than just an advisory entity.

The solutions group noted that once the right district-wide flexibilities are in place, each school staff should vote on whether its school should submit a waiver request that would allow it to pursue different staffing and class scheduling models. As one solutions team member noted, “Building level teams could put forth a plan and ask for waivers to contracts. When you have buy-in from staff, this is huge.” Schools might be represented by a school-based team that includes the principal, union representative and other teachers. Each representative, imagined the solutions group, should have autonomy to vote on how additional instructional and collaboration time might be used and how new school schedules and staffing policies might be implemented.

Ultimately, the school district must be the primary enabler of the initiative, emphasized the solutions group. It must permit schedule flexibility at the school level. It must also establish a funding formula that allows local schools to target resources toward extended day efforts so that a longer school day is financially sustainable. It must, where appropriate, negotiate extended hours and compensation tied to that extension. The district also should partner with external providers and, where appropriate, build the technology infrastructure for learning labs.

Most importantly, both the school and the district must make the case to stakeholders for why an extended school day is necessary. Persuading some in the community of the need to extend the learning day will not be easy. The solutions group suggested that district leaders, school leaders, union leaders and key external stakeholders must work jointly to develop a clear rationale and a companion communication strategy. The rationale and communication strategy should explain why today’s learning day is insufficient and how additional instructional time will result in

greater student success. It might also explain how similar efforts have played out in other schools and districts.

Solutions group members also suggested that the state can facilitate transitions to extended school days, in particular by allowing flexibility in staffing and scheduling. This might include revising state requirements for who can work with students during the school day, allowing external partners and different categories of employees to work with students, not just teachers. The state, solutions group members posited, can revise funding formulas to support extended days or direct grants toward schools implementing extended day programs.

Finally, noted the solutions group, local partnerships are essential to the success of extending the learning day. Non-profit partners such as the YMCA, local museums, community and faith-based groups, businesses, and higher education can all play important roles in extending the learning day for students. This is particularly true in the delivery of informal, out-of-school learning opportunities. As one solutions team participant put it, “There are a lot of places to learn - the school building isn’t the only place.” In addition to off-site learning opportunities, key school-based partnerships should be forged to allow for on-site academic tutoring, targeted intervention or enrichment activities.

## What Does Successful Implementation Look Like?

The solutions group suggested that districts, unions and their partners should measure success by the existence of an extended learning day, collaborative learning and planning time for teachers and staff, and the presence of external partners who help drive student learning.

The solutions group stressed that, over the long haul, student achievement would be higher, achievement gaps would narrow and college-going rates would increase. This model, concluded the solutions group, would excite students and keep them on track for success.

## What Are Possible Barriers to Implementation?

The solutions group pinpointed five barriers that, if left unchecked, could derail efforts to extend the learning day.

- 1. Traditional district schedules and operating procedures.** An extended learning day impacts district operations, including bus, lunch, athletic and custodial schedules. Schools can overcome these hurdles through strong intergovernmental partnerships and creative solutions that use existing space and resources from partners.
- 2. A lack of funding to support additional learning time and staff.** Although some extended learning models that allow for staggering staff time are almost cost neutral, other models are not and would require a more significant increase in funding, whether through a reallocation of grant dollars or increased base funding. As one participant noted, “You’ve got to have a way to pay for the operational aspect of extending time. If you don’t have these things, it doesn’t work.” Again, other government agencies or local community partners might help mitigate this risk. For instance, partners might be positioned to raise separate funds to operate an after-school program.

3. **An absence of community support.** Locking in community support for an extended school day or year might be challenging in many communities. For instance, in some communities many students work or provide care to siblings during after-school hours. Extended school schedules often overlap with after-school sports schedules. Given this context, district, school, union and community leaders must develop and communicate a strong rationale for extending the learning day in service of student success.
4. **An absence of faculty and staff support.** This initiative represents a significant change in practice for faculty and staff. Successfully bringing faculty and staff along with the change will require their direct and on-going engagement from the beginning and strong and collaborative district, school and union leadership.
5. **More complicated staffing patterns that impact union membership.** An extended learning day brings with it a more complicated staffing pattern that includes external partners and others who will work with students. It might be challenging to determine who is a part of the bargaining unit. The joint-labor management committee, discussed earlier in the brief, should address this challenge at the district level.

## Solution 2: Using Technology to Personalize Learning for All Students

The group's second solution calls for using technology to personalize learning so that students can grow at their own pace. The solutions group defined personalized learning as an approach that "makes learning meaningful to the interests of the individual student while also accelerating learning through

college and career ready standards." Personalized learning acknowledges the multiple pathways to student achievement, and that it is the responsibility of adults to work with students and keep them on track for success. Noted a member of the solutions group, "The current one-size-fits-all system that exists in many districts today is not built to allow for this personalization of learning."

The solutions group discussed how technology can play a critical role in personalizing learning for students because it helps forge a strong student connection. It, members suggested, enables the development of tailored learning opportunities for students. If implemented effectively, personalized learning through technology is an important tool to increase student time on task, engagement and academic performance.

The use of technology to personalize learning can take many forms, group members noted. For example, in one classroom reorganized to personalize student learning, some students might be working at their own pace in learning laboratories, while a teacher directs individual students or small groups of students. Students can be self-directed, with teachers and other staff checking in on them periodically and through online assessments, suggested another group member.

The solutions group noted that, through the use of technology, some teachers may be able to work with students beyond their campus, allowing students to access learning materials most suited for them. For instance, a high school student might have access via the internet to a teacher across town leading an Advanced Placement chemistry course that was previously unavailable at her school. This represents a personalized learning opportunity for her.

Fully embedding and integrating technology into student learning, suggested the solutions group, will

require an overhaul in how school staff are scheduled and grouped. Embedded technologies will impact the student/teacher ratio, as students in technology lab settings might be in larger classes, but receive teaching and learning support in smaller classes. This adjustment in the staffing model, noted the solutions group, enables personalization in part because teachers can work individually with students.

Finally, asserted the solutions group, personalized learning through technology should include intense academic and career counseling that can more effectively tap into the interests and aptitudes of students and meet the common standards established for all learners. To this end, curriculum and standards would need to be mapped to the various technologies so that students are ultimately working toward the same goals at their own pace, the group suggested.

## What Steps Are Necessary to Implement Personalized Learning Through Technology

The solutions group noted that for most districts, labor and management will need to come together to amend their collective bargaining agreements to address issues such as class size, teacher evaluation under a blended learning model and staffing and scheduling flexibilities necessary to make the model work. In addition, a joint labor-management committee should be established to work through key non-contractual elements such as professional development of staff and curriculum mapping. This committee should start with a joint compact of agreed-upon values and an operating procedure that expresses the shared vision of this new approach to student learning. This global statement will help set the tone and ensure that both parties are moving together.

The district, posited the solutions group, will be the linchpin of change for using technology to personalize learning. As such, the district will be responsible for staff training and professional development necessary for a smooth transition. The solutions group noted that technology implementation, a critical start-up step to making this solution work, would need to occur at the district level as well. Resources should be dedicated to technology, hardware, support and, in some cases, facilities. In addition, school board approval will likely be needed to allow for policy changes in areas such as course credits, promotion and retention. Finally, the district will need to drive community engagement and establish key partnerships with providers who can help schools transition to and sustain the change.

The solutions group also highlighted a role for states. The state could support hardware purchases or consider the enactment of a different funding formula that supports the use of technology and blended learning systemically.

External community partners will be essential in supporting districts in the development and customization of blending learning models. These partners can train teachers, build online curriculum and teach students directly, among other things.

## What Does Success Look Like?

Indicators of success, suggested the solution group, would be evidence that students are in control of their own learning. Students would demonstrate mastery of the standards, with important school-level support. They would be able to name their strong skills, their weak skills and steps they are taking to get better. They would work at their own pace and have more time on task.

Ultimately, envisioned the solutions group, successful implementation of this personalized approach through

the use of technology would result in reduced student absences and dropout rates, more students on-track to graduate, the narrowing of achievement gaps and higher college completion rates.

## What Are Barriers to Using Technology to Personalize Learning?

The solutions group identified the following barriers for using technology to personalize learning:

- 1. Technology is expensive.** While over time the cost of the technology may represent a cost-neutral investment, the short-term start-up costs of new systems, technology, training and other staff supports will likely be significant. Many school and district technology infrastructures will require upgrades for this model to work. Solutions group members suggested that districts should look to existing proof points to see how funding has been addressed in a sustainable way. Flexibility in class size and staffing may help alleviate some budget issues as well.
- 2. Current collective bargaining agreements may not support necessary changes.** Many aspects of the collective bargaining agreement will need to be re-worked, including class size restrictions, teacher evaluation policies specific to a blended learning environment and school staffing and scheduling restrictions. A joint labor-management committee should work to establish flexibilities in these areas.

- 3. Blaming students for lack of growth.** A danger associated with personalized learning is the inclination of adults to blame the students for not learning – because the students ultimately own their own learning. As one solutions team member put it, “We can’t allow our systems to avoid responsibility for student learning.” Adults must still be responsible for student learning. Defining who owns student learning and is accountable for student success remains an important consideration in designing any personalized learning plan.

## Reflections from the Convening Co-sponsors

High-functioning systems can amplify the accomplishments of their educators, but a dysfunctional school or district can undermine the impact of even the best teachers. We need schools and districts whose climates and cultures, use of time, approaches to staffing, use of technology, deployment of support services, and engagement of families and communities are optimized to continuously improve outcomes for the students they serve. To accomplish this, all stakeholders—parents, teachers, school boards, superintendents and administrators, business leaders, and community members—must take responsibility for the academic and social well-being of the students in their charge and engage in the strong, consistent, and sustained collaboration critical to making improvement possible.

## ***A Word about This Brief***

In late July 2013, as an extension to its 2011 and 2012 convenings to maximize labor-management collaboration, the U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with numerous national organizations, hosted state and local education leaders at GE Foundation's *Summer Conference for Educators*. Specifically, convening organizers asked participants to consider how structures and systems of collaborative labor relations—including collective bargaining and other agreements, joint committees and structures, and policies and practices—could be harnessed to better support teachers and leaders in implementing college- and career-ready standards. Convening organizers grouped participants in one of five teams each charged to consider one of five distinct college- and career-ready (CCR) standards implementation challenges: *Professional Development*, *Instructional Teamwork*, *Access to Quality Instruction in High-Need Schools*, *Student Time* and *Curricular and Instructional Materials*.

This brief represents the best thinking of the *Student Time* solutions group, which investigated the following question:

- *How can collective bargaining agreements and other joint policies and structures create flexibility in the student school day, week and year so that students are supported and advanced in real-time, based on demonstrated competencies?*