MAKING THE MOST OF EXPANDED LEARNING IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Mayor de Blasio’s bold vision for Community Schools, enumerated in the recent New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan, describes how schools can work in collaboration with families, non-profits and other community organizations to ensure young people reach their full potential academically, socially and emotionally. This transformative work requires more than adding new services to the school’s offerings. Rather, it requires a fundamental rethinking of what schools are meant to do—namely, become community centers comprised of educators, families, community-based organizations (CBOs) and city agencies that share a vision of learning and success.

This paper outlines promising practices in expanded learning, a key component in Community Schools, and includes examples from schools that work with TASC (The After-School Corporation), NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, Generation Schools Network and National Center on Time & Learning. With the support of the Donors’ Education Collaborative, these groups represent a diverse set of stakeholders and together have decades of experience in expanded learning implementation.

On the following pages, we offer recommendations to ensure that the broad network of Community Schools get the most out of their expanded learning efforts, whether supported through Attendance Improvement and Dropout Prevention (AIDP), the Renewal Schools initiative, or networks such as those led by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) or the Children’s Aid Society.
LESSONS LEARNED

NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, Generation Schools Network, National Center on Time & Learning and TASC offer lessons from our experiences in expanded learning with some examples to illustrate.

Planning is decision-oriented and collaborative. The integration of expanded learning into a Community School’s design begins by actively identifying and incorporating into a clear plan the needs of students, as well as the desires of parents, teachers and community partners.

In TASC’s ExpandED Schools, teams made up of school administrators, community-based non-profit organizations, parents and other community members meet throughout the winter, spring and summer to plan for the following year’s expanded learning day. Collectively, they assess areas of strength and growth, think through staffing and course offerings, data-sharing and communication plans, and develop strategies for improvement throughout the year.

There is alignment between the traditional school day and expanded time. School and CBO leaders can encourage alignment throughout the learning day by establishing and communicating a common vision related to themes, project-based learning and curricula. It is vital that teachers and administrators view the adults who work for or volunteer with expanded learning non-profits as partners. These community educators facilitate enrichments and academic support activities and have a wealth of experience and knowledge that are a resource to schools. Schools and CBOs may also align behavior and other school protocols and set up professional development, data-sharing and communication plans to ensure that a seamless, expanded school day supports learning goals and student success.

In addition to collaborating on STEM and literacy learning goals, Good Shepherd Services at South Bronx Academy for Applied Media has discipline policies that are consistent with the school day. All community educators attend a school disciplinary training facilitated by the dean of schools.

Flexible structures are in place, allowing schools and communities to choose the approach that is right for them. School teams need the flexibility to establish protocols and access the tools and resources that will allow them to establish an expanded learning program that addresses their particular needs.

Brooklyn Generation School provides 200 days of instruction for students without increasing the work year for teachers. Students have Foundation and Studio courses for the majority of their school days. Starting in ninth grade, twice a year for a month at a time, they work with teachers in “Intensives” to explore college and career pathways, meet professionals, visit organizations including corporations, non-profits and city agencies, and visit colleges. While the Intensives team is working with a grade of students, grade-level teachers have time to work collaboratively, reflect and prepare for the next round of Foundation and Studio courses.
Progress assessments are continuous and collaborative. It is important to develop processes and indicators that provide formative feedback so schools and community partners can collaboratively assess progress towards meeting learning goals and re-tool expanded learning designs in real time.

The National Center on Time and Learning uses a Progress Monitoring system that tracks indicators in schools, communities, districts and states. The system measures growth in: how time is used; how teacher and student perceptions change over time; students’ academic achievement; attendance and discipline; and sustainability.

There is individualized instruction. Schools and their partners use extra time to infuse academic supports that meet students at their own levels, whether they are falling below or exceeding grade-level expectations, are English language learners, or have special needs. The extra time also allows for every student to participate in enriching courses in art, music and physical movement, which are required as part of public education in New York City.

TASC’s Middle School ExTRa is a public-private initiative aimed at strengthening literacy instruction in middle schools. The school day is extended by 2.5 hours to explore arts, sports and learning opportunities like debate and robotics. Students who struggle with reading comprehension spend one hour a day in small group, guided independent reading sessions, where adults support growth in comprehension skills and analysis of level-appropriate, engaging books selected by students.

Brooklyn Generation School courses are taught by teams of teachers and follow a set scope, sequence, calendar and curriculum. The school can rotate or plan new classes to meet the specific needs of students as they arise. This programming structure enables the school to meet specific student needs and offers greater collaboration among teachers.

TASC’s ExpandED Options provides high school students with apprenticeships that offer in-depth instruction in specific areas of interest, such as science, media or culinary arts. It also increases motivation for both students who have lost interest in school and those who are seeking a greater challenge. Students spend time at community and cultural organizations and learn the content of their field of study as well as the skills to teach that content to younger children.

There is strong parent and community engagement. Community school teams engage parents, students and community members in planning, design, implementation and evaluation of expanded learning in an active and ongoing way. As they design their expanded learning program, community school teams should explore creative ways to engage all parents and community members in order to build strong, lasting partnerships. Parent and community participation should not only be required, but reviewed as part of the NYC Department of Education's (DOE) monitoring and technical assistance.

NYC Coalition for Educational Justice has decades of experience building strong parent participation through face-to-face community outreach, relationship-building and leadership development. Community schools can use these same community-organizing techniques to increase parent participation and leadership, and keep parents engaged through research-tested models such as parent-teacher home visits, academic parent-teacher teams and the parent mentor program.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on lessons learned from expanded learning models throughout New York City and the country, we offer the following recommendations:

**Ensure a seamless expanded learning experience for every child in a Community School.** Renewal Schools are required to add an instructional hour for every student by the start of the 2015-2016 school year. They can work with their community school partners to design a schedule that builds on each of their assets and ensures that every child has experiences in the afternoon that match his/her needs and interests. The instructor who will facilitate academic support and enrichment may be a certified teacher from the school, a teacher coming in from another school or program, or a teaching artist with specific expertise, such as in capoeira, videography or writing computer code. Many funding streams can be used by schools and partners to expand learning (see Table 1).

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### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNDING SOURCE</th>
<th>RECIPIENT</th>
<th>POTENTIAL USES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title I Priority</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Stagger teacher schedules; more teaching time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title III Funds</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Stagger teacher schedules; more teaching time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROSE</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Increase flexibility in teacher/student schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement Grant</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Increase operational flexibilities/capacity building, more teaching time and collaboration, increase family/community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Innovation Funds</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Support whole school redesign efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpandED Schools/ExpandED Options</td>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Literacy support/individualized tutoring; experiential learning for high school students</td>
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<tr>
<td>21st Century Community Learning Center</td>
<td>CBO or School</td>
<td>Supplement school services during and after the school day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Support school STEM, literacy and student leadership goals after 3pm, weekends and/or holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC Summer Quest</td>
<td>CBO or School</td>
<td>Address summer learning loss; curriculum taught by a blend of teachers and community educators</td>
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</table>

But funding streams shouldn’t determine what children get to do with their extra time; students’ needs and interests should. The additional instruction time should not be used solely for test prep or academic intensives that repeat what students do during the school day. Additional time should ensure that every student has opportunities for enrichments and individualized or small group instruction, and encourage blended staffing where teachers and community professionals can support student learning goals.
Consider staggering schedules for willing school staff. School teams have the option to work with their union representative and the UFT to shift schedules of UFT members. Other staff may shift their schedules as well. At P.S. 186 in Brooklyn, the Assistant Principal and Parent Coordinator work from 10:00 a.m. to 6 p.m. to support expanded school hours and meet their goals of seeing parents at dismissal.

Offer facilitated planning, coaching and technical assistance to community school teams during and beyond initial planning phase. It is important for community school teams to develop robust, aligned and coherent plans. Coaches who can structure effective group meetings and draw on promising practices across expanded learning efforts can enable school teams to focus on their priorities. Spring and summer planning should set realistic goals for September. During the academic year, further collaboration and analysis will deepen partnerships and strategies to result in better outcomes for students and their families. Directors of School Renewal, technical assistance partners, central Renewal Schools staff and other advisors should align expectations to ensure that school teams have clear direction for planning and feel supported through a fully collaborative process.

Provide options so transportation isn’t a barrier for any student. Yellow-bus services are available to students until the 6th grade or if required through an IEP, and are typically unavailable for late-day pick-up. Older youth may have to cross highways or walk through dangerous neighborhoods to get to buses and subway lines, which may limit access to and from school and expanded learning partners. Participation in expanded learning activities may be limited because of the cost of transportation or for safety reasons. The Department of Education’s Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) should arrange late-day yellow-bus transportation for eligible students. In addition, they should ensure that student Metrocards don’t limit access to expanded learning options. Older students may need extra rides to take courses outside of the school building or be allowed to use Metrocards on weekends and days when school is not in session, like holiday breaks. The MTA, NYC Department of Transportation and OPT should create stops directly outside schools for pick up at school dismissal times, including expanded learning hours (e.g., 5:30 or 6 PM).

Work with the NYPD Office of School Safety, the DOE Office of School Safety and Youth Development (OSYD), and Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to encourage building-wide safety and school discipline coordination. Between 2014 and 2015, the de Blasio administration nearly doubled the number of school-based after-school programs in NYC; yet the number of school safety agents remained the same. Greater collaboration between individual schools, NYPD, OSYD and DYCD should ensure the appropriate number of school safety agents in each building, coherence in approaches to behavioral intervention, coordination among school safety officers with all partners in the building, joint training with school safety officers (where possible), and participation of Community Schools and expanded learning partners on building safety teams. All of this will create safer schools, full implementation of school discipline reforms, and encourage stronger school climate.

Develop protocols to encourage effective use of Student Information Systems. School leaders need to use student information systems (e.g., Attendance Tracking System, STARS/HSST) to capture expanded learning activities as part of the learning day. School staff, superintendents and central DOE offices that oversee and advise the use of those systems should receive training on the nuances
of learning time within each school’s expanded learning plan. This will help flag and resolve potential problems so that information systems are not barriers to implementation, but rather facilitate careful analysis of data.

**Expedite School-Age Child Care (SACC) Licenses.** Operational challenges shouldn’t stop schools and their community partners from effective program implementation. Grants to non-profit organizations to provide after-school services generally require a SACC license, which has building and staff regulations that conflict with DOE regulations. Community partners are often expected to make repairs or changes to school buildings where they have no jurisdiction to do so. The process is vexing, leaves community partners and school administrators frustrated, and delays program implementation. After-school programs under the leadership of the school principal do not require a SACC license. Central DOE and individual school principals could take responsibility for the health and safety of students in expanded learning so those requirements remain consistent throughout the day. Expanded learning programs could be considered “principal-led,” thus meeting NY State school policies and falling within liability coverage of the DOE for services to students in school buildings.

**Use short-term funding to catalyze long-term change.** Short term funds should focus on growing capacity, establishing processes for improvement and creating systems for sustainability, not only for providing direct service to young people. Community School funds help build capacity and encourage changes in practice of teachers, administrators and the central office to better meet the needs of students, their families and communities. Focusing on the changes in adult practice and creating a culture in which school/community partnerships thrive will help ensure long-term outcomes for all.

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**CONCLUSION**

The Community Schools approach is not only a tool for school re-design, but also community re-design. Expanded learning offers the time, talent and resources to help meet a range of goals: improved academic, social and emotional outcomes for young people; parent and community engagement; and professional development for educators. The proper planning, implementation and evaluation of more and better learning time can help support the healthy development of our city’s young people, their families and communities.

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**ABOUT THE E³ POLICY GROUP**

In early 2014, TASC, NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, Generation Schools Network and National Center on Time & Learning, with the support of Donors’ Education Collaborative, came together to create a policy working group to advance Excellence in Expanded Education (E³). We believe that expanded learning can narrow educational inequities and raise student achievement. The goal of E³ is to transform the educational experience of New York City public school students by creating coordinated and supportive policies that enable students to get significantly more and better hours of learning time. For more information about the E³ collaborative, please contact Saskia Traill, Vice President of Policy and Research at TASC, at straill@expandschools.org or 646-943-8757.