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using best practices in out-of-school time learning to guide the implementation of extended day learning in turnaround schools

a position paper

**“A school system can never be any better than the teachers teaching in it, if you want to start a revolution in education make it happen in your own classroom.”**

*Sir Ken Robinson*

Activities conducted during the hours and days that schools are traditionally closed have been treated largely as an afterthought by educators and school reformers. Whether referred to as OST (out-of-school time) or ELT (extended learning time), these activities have been at best marginal (or more often, not mentioned at all) in discussions about how to turn around schools deemed as failing. Yet, if we base our decisions on research and experience, there is a strong basis to believe that high-quality ELT can make a very important contribution to re-engaging students alienated by their experiences with conventional academics and turned off by multiple hours and days of "test prep." The following pages will examine the published literature related to OST and ELT programs, and make the case that the best practices of these programs can and should be part of the solution as educators and other decision makers look to address the needs of our nation's learners.

**High Quality Out-of-school time (OST) programs are effective**

High quality out-of-school time programming is effective in supporting academic growth in students. When school administrators think about out-of-school time learning, they often think of the after school programs of yesteryear. Over the last fifteen years, the field of out-of-school time learning has grown exponentially. With increased focus on school accountability and student performance, the field of OST has developed from after school care programs to structured, data driven programs designed to support the academic needs of our most high risk students. These programs typically target a specific demographic of students such as economically disadvantaged, special education, and/or English language learners but the practices could be used to support the learning of all students.

It is understandable that some individuals may not believe that out-of-school time programs have a positive impact on student academic growth. Some of this belief is founded in the contradictory research that has been presented over the last few years.

Some data has shown OST programs to have an impact on academic growth, some on social emotional and career and college readiness skills only, and some have not seen growth at all.

There is one main concern with the information that has been reported over the years. That concern is that there was not a systematic way to review all of the different types of program designs, structures, and philosophies. Some programs may have been designed only as a “safe place” for children to engage in recreational activities while their parents were at work. These types of programs did not provide academic, homework help, or tutoring options. Some programs may have a focus on academics and homework help but not have a strict attendance policy. With these concerns in mind, research has been conducted to collect and review data to provide systematic information while taking these limitations into account.

What has been found is that in “high quality” out-of-school time programs there is a positive impact on academic learning. There are a handful of components that deem a program “high quality” and impact overall student growth. See Figure 1 for components of a high quality OST program. (Hall & Gruber, 2007).

Research has shown that high quality out-of-school time programs such as the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) have shown a positive impact on student grades, increased standardized test scores, increased school

day attendance and reduced the rate of chronic absenteeism, increased class participation and homework completion, and increased the likelihood of grade promotion. (Afterschool Alliance, 2017).

Figure 1

*COMPONENTS OF A HIGH QUALITY OST PROGRAM*

* Intentional academic focus
* Consistent attendance
* Use of quality staff
* Use of community partnerships
* Family engagement
* Use of data to drive continuous improvement

**Extended learning time is an effective strategy for turnaround schools**

Adding more time to the school year is not a new concept. There are many articles that suggest that students are required to learn and produce much more today than ever before. In addition to needing to learn more, students are also faced with a culture of heighten accountability to prove what they know. Administrators understand that adding more time provides additional opportunities for learning. Yet, many schools still shy away from the idea of adding more time.

The first question to address is, what is extended learning time? The U.S.

Department of Education defines extended learning time (ELT), also called expanded learning time, as “the use of a longer school day, week, or year to significantly boost the number of school hours for core academic subjects as well for other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education.” (Silva, E., 2012).

According to this definition, extended time must be available to all students, provide teachers with additional time for professional development and planning, and requires that an ELT schedule increase a school schedule by at least 300 hours. (Silva, E., 2012).

What do extended learning time programs look like today? Well, that is part of the challenge in reviewing ELT programs. There is no set standard for how to implement an ELT program. Some school districts opt to extend the entire school day, some opt to extend the school year. Some schools partner with community based organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club for enrichment programming, while teachers utilize that time for collaborative planning and/or professional development. The U.S. Department of Education has not set a standard for what is required of extended learning time programs, yet, some states such as Massachusetts have outlined required components to implement ELT. Unlike OST programs, extended learning time programs are still in their infancy. The first extended learning time programs were rolled out in Massachusetts in 2006, when ten school districts extended their school day by approximately two hours per day. (Massachusetts Center on Time and Learning, n.d.).

In the beginning stages of discussing ELT implementation, districts and schools may grapple with the question of how to add time. Questions such as what programming do we need to offer, how do we offer it, how do we work with teacher unions to support schedule

change and staffing needs are on the forethought of many administrators.

Figure 3

*RESULTS FROM ELT MIXED STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION*

* Significant gains in standardized scores in mathematics and English language arts
* Provides more time for students to grasp concepts, explore and practice new material in different contexts to develop proficiency, and allows teachers to slow down and take a step back to reteach a concept if students are not able to grasp, more time for students to work on projects
* Increases enrichment opportunities for students
* Provides continued access to enrichment activities that are typically cut that are vital for building the social and emotional skills that are necessary for career and college readiness.

(Farbman & Kaplan, 2005).

Districts and schools across the nation have successfully implemented extended-learning time programs. Successful ELT programs use mixed implementation strategy which consists of; longer class periods for core classes, additional math and English language arts classes, professional development and planning time, extracurricular and enrichment activities, tutoring and homework help, and community building activities and events. (Farbman & Kaplan, 2005). Below Figure2 shows an example of an ELT schedule. Citizen Schools from 2:20-5:00pm house opportunities for tutoring and homework help, extracurricular and enrichment programming, and community building activities. Figure 3 details the successes from using mixed strategy approach to ELT.

Figure 2

*SAMPLE ELA SCHEDULE*

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

Note: Reprinted from Transforming Schools through Expanded Learning Time by Roy Chan. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED562016.pdf

While extended-learning programs have identified themes needed for success, the way in which schools add time is still flexible based on school need. In the report, *Minute by Minute: School Strategies for Optimizing Time*, the ten successful ELT schools reviewed used a variety of models to add time including adding time before and after school,

some add time through summer programs, and many include Saturday classes. Each of the schools use extended time differently based on their school’s needs. For example, schools may use time to specifically help struggling students, give students access to extracurricular activities both in-house and with community partners, to add youth

development opportunities, or to support students with preparation for college admissions such as SAT prep and essay writing. (Corwin, et al., 2014).

Administrators are able to design a program that best meets the needs of their school and their students for optimal school success.

**Common concerns associated with ELT implementation**

Administrators are often concerned that implementing ELT is expensive and not sustainable.Determining the actual cost of extended-learning time is difficult because schools run ELT programs very differently. There might be different regulations for staffing and teacher pay based on the type of schools; public, charter, pilot.

According to Farbman & Kaplan (2005), for a public school district, the cost typically ranges between “$900 and $1,500 per student, depending on the amount of additional time offered and the staffing strategy used to cover that time.” In reviewing three schools in Farbman and Kaplan’s (2005) report, the percentage increase in cost above the districts average was between 7-12%. What is important to remember is that the increase in cost is not directly proportional to the time added. Cost is analyzed based on a “cost per student hour” metric which involves dividing the cost per student by the total number of hours the student attends school. (Farbman & Kaplan, 2005).

Regardless of the specifics of cost associated with ELT, there are a number of strategies for financing extended-learning time programs. Districts and schools often rely on a combination of public and private funds to finance additional hours including special allocation from the district, utilizing local, state and federal grants, and creating partnership with local business to provide private grants or donations. (Farbman & Kaplan, 2005).

Additionally, districts are often concerned about the constraints of teacher unions on changing the school day schedule. Districts and schools have been successful in working with teacher unions to use School-Based Options (SBOs) to allow for necessary schedule changes to reconfigure the school day. Examples of schedule changes including using SBOs to add planning time during the school day, use extended time for inquiry work, create block programming, and start the school day earlier or run it later. (Corwin, et al., 2014).

Another looming concern for administrators is the sustainability of implementing ELT programs. Sustainability in the public education sector for any program component is always a question and a concern. Districts can no longer assume that their state and local funds will cover all of the necessary components that are required to educate our students. Therefore, many districts have found creative means to fund programs to ensure sustainability.

Districts or schools have engaged in creative planning including utilizing community partnerships to off-set cost of staff, partnering with local colleges and universities to provide education students to help staff homework help and tutoring sessions, developing swing staffing schedules to stretch current staffing budgets, and leveraging additional resources such as Title One funds can help support additional time. (Farbman & Kaplan, 2005).

**Schools can use known best practices in high quality OST to develop strong ELT programs.**

District and school administrators do not need to recreate the wheel when developing ELT programming. Administrators can lean on the successes of OST to help guide the development of their ELT program.

What does OST do really well? Using a series of best practices that define program quality, OST programs have figured out the hard work of re-engaging students in their

learning. District and school administrators can design effective ELT programming by using these best practices in conjunction with

mixed strategy ELT implementation. As previously mentioned, mixed strategy implementation consists of longer class periods for core classes, additional math and English language arts classes, professional development and planning time, extracurricular and enrichment activities, tutoring and homework help, and community building activities and events.

Metz, Goldsmith, and Arbreton (2008) synthesize evidence related to afterschool program outcomes, to define six best practices that result in high program quality. In the following pages, I will break down each best practice in OST and how it can be used to help design and implement ELT programming. See Figure 4 to the right for the six best practices of a high quality OST program.

Figure 4

*SIX BEST PRACTICES OF HIGH QUALITY OST PROGRAM QUALITY*

*Focused and intentional strategy:* Programs have a clear set of goals, target specific skills and deliberately plan all aspects of the program with a youth development framework in mind.

*Exposure:* Programs are designed to provide preteens with a sufficient number of

hours per week over an extended period of time to achieve program outcome goals; and

allow preteens to attend a variety of activities.

*Supportive relationships:* Programs emphasize positive adult–youth relationships regardless of the curriculum.

*Family engagement:* Programs strive to include families through various strategies, such as clear communication and a welcoming environment.

*Cultural competence:* Programs have diverse staff whose backgrounds

are reflective of participants and who

create practices and policies that make services available to (and inclusive of) a

variety of populations; and help participants

understand and value a broad range of cultures.

*Continuous program improvement:* Programs strengthen quality through an ongoing and integrated process of targeted staff training, coaching and monitoring, and data collection and analysis. (Metz, et al., 2008)

**Focused and intentional strategy**

By using a mixed strategy implementation approach to ELT programming, administrators lay the foundation for focused and intentional programming. Administrators should ensure that programming purposely connects to state learning standards while providing opportunities for civic engagement, leadership development, mentoring and collaboration. Most importantly, learning should be driven by the needs and interests of students. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013).

High quality out-of-school time programs have become the experts in using innovative, hands-on approaches to learning that support students’ academic growth by promoting student engagement in learning. These approaches include inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, service learning, and the use of technology. Each of these learning approaches requires the involvement of student voice and direction in their learning. By using these types of learning approaches, teachers are able to ensure academic growth

as well as the development of intermediary skills necessary for career and college readiness.

One of the challenges seen during the traditional school day in utilizing these types of teaching approaches was amount of time required for successful facilitation. The extended time allotted in ELT programming allows for the same learning approaches to be used to promote high engagement in learning in every classroom.

In addition to using engaging teaching approaches, student voice has been imperative when designing extracurricular and enrichment programming for a successful ELT program. Students make suggestions for topics to be studied, suggest ways to implement learning, and at times, develop and implement student-led programming. As educators increase opportunities for student choice, control, and collaboration, student motivation and engagement also increase. The use of student voice has resulted in greater classroom participation, better self-reflection, and decrease in behavioral problems. (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Figure 5 highlights Zeldin, O’Connor, and Camino (2006) areas of growth associated with the use of student voice.

Intentional program design should also include opportunities for tutoring and homework help for all students. Successful homework help and/or tutoring sessions are staffed appropriately ensuring a staff-to-student ratio that provides optimal student coverage. There are a number of ways that ELT may create opportunities for homework help and tutoring. Some programs may choose to schedule specific days and times for small group or drop in support, run traditional study hall style help sessions, or create English language arts or math centers. Schools can also use Google Forms or PowerSchool pages monitored by educators to provide support for students at home.

In addition to homework help and/or tutoring opportunities, ELT programs should include extracurricular and enrichment activities. Programs should be cross curricular and offer an array of different opportunities for enrichment to allow students to explore and spark new interests. Programming should include a range of topics such as cooking, writing, reading, films, technology, theatre, arts, physical activities, engineering, and STEM.

Figure 5

*AREAS OF GROWTH FROM STUDENT VOICE*

* Identity exploration
* Self confidence
* Social capital
* Social competencies
* Civic competencies
* Research skills
* Critical thinking skills
* Problem-solving skills

(Zeldin, et al., 2006)

Successful enrichment programming embeds skill development into programming activities. For example, students may learn about financial literacy by participating in a real life simulation of the Game of Life. Students may engage in a slam poetry theatre program that embeds English language literacy skills into performance theatre. Students may learn about science, math, technology while exploring the legal system in a Forensics program. Enrichment programming is an excellent place to provide direct or indirect social emotional learning opportunities. Students work on skills such as self-regulation, communication, and responsible decision while developing teamwork skills necessary for group collaboration.

**Exposure**

High quality OST programs provide students with a significant amount of learning time over a consistent period of time and provide opportunities to participate in a variety of activities. A mixed strategy approach to ELT implementation provides the necessary time and variation in activities to ensure adequate program exposure. Administrators are encouraged to offer enrichment programs on a trimester schedule with students participating in two enrichment programs per week. This allows students to explore a variety of interests and reduces boredom, thus, keeping students engaged.

**Supportive relationships**

School day staff work hard to develop strong connections with their students. Teachers and paraprofessionals set clear and consistent expectations, perform “check and connects” with students, and try to be available for students throughout the day. Teachers understand the importance of developing supportive relationships with students, yet at times the focus on students may be overshadowed by the increasing demands of the teaching profession.

While teachers are juggling multiple priorities, OST professionals understand that for programming to be successful they must prioritize developing strong relationships between staff and students. Students must have a sense of belonging to engage in OST programming. Creating strong relationships within the OST program helps develop a sense of belonging that can strengthen in time.

Why are student-to-staff relationships important? Students strive for understanding, acceptance, and respect. Additionally, strong relationships with adults has been shown to increase student engagement, reduce behavioral issues, and increase attendance. (Zins, Goleman, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

ELT programs have the opportunity to develop authentic, deep connections with students. See Figure 6 for strategies on developing staff-to-student relationships.ELT programs should also focus on developing strong peer-to-peer relationships.

Figure 6

*STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING*

*STAFF-TO-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS*

* Learn students’ **names** and pronounce them correctly. Ask students for their preferred name and call them by it.
* Show students that you are **genuinely interested** in the and care about them.
* Engage in multiple 1:1 **conversation** that last more than 2 minutes. Make sure you are talking about things that interest students not just academics.
* Be positive! Show students that you are happy to see them. Students feed off of your **body language**.
* Be aware of **self-esteem**. Don’t criticize in front of friends. Speak privately about behavior or work issues.
* **Listen!** Take the time to listen the student who wants to share their painting with you or wants to talk to you about their upcoming birthday party. Building the foundation for open communication with students lays the groundwork for important conversations in the future.

As with staff-to-student relationships, peer relationships are important to developing a sense of belonging, thus, increases student engagement.

High quality OST programs strive to create welcoming, family like, nurturing relationships. (Fredricks, Hackett, & Bregman, 2010) Programs work hard incorporate opportunities that allow for a “family like” community to develop over time. Figure 7 shows strategies that ELT programs could use to develop peer-to-peer relationships.

Figure 7

*STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING*

*PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIPS*

* Find ways to **connect** and **share**. Morning meetings and end of the day shout outs work well.
* Give students opportunities to **chat** and connect with their peers. Unstructured snack time is a perfect opportunity for peer chat.
* Provide learning opportunities that allow students to **work together** to collaborate, communicate, and connect.
* Use team builders and ice breakers to create a **collaborative learning community**.
* Build a community by **posting and sharing** pictures of students and their work.

**Family engagement**

When we hear family engagement, many of us think of traditional parent-teacher organization events such as Bingo Night or Pasta Night. In OST, family engagement is viewed as family involvement as opposed to a one-off family engagement event. Family involvement focuses on developing a partnership between the school, the teacher, the family, and the child to create a supportive relationship in educating and growing the child.

High quality OST programs have developed a series of practices that support the development of a relationship between families and schools. Strategies are personal and open the door for the educators to get to know the student and family, and for the family to get to know educators.

Figure 8

*WAYS TO INVOLVE FAMILIES IN LEARNING*

* Does a family member have a skill set that they could share in an enrichment program?
* Does someone have an immigration story they’d like to share?
* Is there a parent or grandparent that would like to read to a class?
* Is there a parent, sibling, aunt or uncle that would like to help with homework help or tutoring sessions?

Strategies include home visits and phone calls to learn about their students. These are followed by consistent (often, weekly) positive parent contact calls. These calls are intended as a check in with families, to share good news about their student, and open the door for consistent two-way communication. OST programs work hard to ensure that any documentation is translated into the families native language and that translators are available, if necessary, to communicate effectively.

In addition to positive contact calls, OST programs provide on-going and consistent communication with families. Some programs still use traditional newsletters, some may use an online service such as Class Dojo or Class Tag, some programs have a website. Whichever method used, it is important to keep it updated and consistent.

The more opportunities to involve families in student learning the better. Engaging your families as partners to learning empowers them to become active members of your school community. See Figure 8 for ways to involve families in learning.

Another avenue for engaging families includes creating a parent advisory council. This could be a new group or a sub-committee of your parent-teacher organization that meets regularly with school administrators to help provide critical feedback and brainstorm opportunities for family engagement.

Additionally, you can use surveys (paper or electronic) to obtain information on how families feel about the school, programs, activities as well as for families to provide suggestions for programming moving forward.

Lastly, while family events should not be the foundation for your family engagement program, they definitely have a place in your program. Are there ways for your families to engage their student’s learning as a family event? Events such as STEM night, Island Survival night, family game night, and family bowling night all provide opportunities for families to work collaboratively developing one or more skills. For these events to be successful in helping to build a bridge between the family and the school, be sure to have your staff partner with individual families to complete activities with them. By partnering staff with families, staff is able to get to know the family while building a natural rapport.

**Cultural competence**

Many school districts already offer a number of services and programs to promote cultural competency in their schools. Schools use diverse hiring practices, translation services, family support programs, and more.

ELT programming provides the unique opportunity to extend your school day and thus, opportunities for cultural competence. OST programs use a number of strategies to promote culture competence in programs that can also be used for ELT programming.

As discussed previously, student voice is vital to ELT program success. Student voice is another way to enhance your program’s cultural competence. Incorporating students’ ideas and values into program elements creates opportunities for cultural inclusion and brings a level of diversity into programs.

Enrichment programming is an excellent opportunity to incorporate elements from a number of different cultural backgrounds. Program such as a virtual field trip around the world or Irish step dancing, open students up to exploring a variety of cultures and traditions.

Administrators should encourage staff and students with different backgrounds to work towards a common goal such as in a service learning project. In addition to working together, individuals should be willing to acknowledge and address diversity amongst staff and students. Open dialogue creates understanding, acceptance, and respect.

Lastly, ELT provides an amazing opportunity to extend learning by bringing in speakers with a variety of backgrounds. It also allows teacher more time to extend learning by using multicultural books, videos, and media.

**Continuous program improvement**

The best OST programs are actively engaged in consistent self-evaluation and reflection. OST programs are open and willing to pivot at any point in the programming process to make their program experience more effective. Data collection, program evaluation, and surveys are administered on an on-going basis, that is consistent and regular. Information is shared with all stakeholders including school administrators, teachers, program staff, community partners, students, and families.

For ELT programs to be successful, they need to implore the same data collection and review processes used by OST programs to help guide program design, implementation, and evaluation. In addition to reviewing how students are performing academically, administrators should also be looking at

growth in areas such as engagement in learning, communication, relations with peers, relations with adults, and more. The development of these intermediary skills can be just as important as the development of academic skills. The National Institute of Out-of-School Time (NIOST) has created A Program Assessment System (APAS) for the evaluation of such skills and program. (National Institute for Out-of-School Time, 2006).

In addition to engaging in consistent program review, administrators should be open to changing program direction based on the information provided by their data collection. If something isn’t working, stop, re-evaluate, and try something new. Often, we are encouraged to wait until the next school year or next program session to make necessary changes. Waiting waste time and creates opportunities for students to become disengaged. It is better to deal with the challenge of changing immediately, if necessary, than to wait to make necessary changes. Ability to pivot at this level will impact the overall effectiveness of your program.

**Conclusion**

As stated in the Wallace Foundation report *Re-imagining the School Day: More Time for Learning*, “it is high time we recognize that schools can’t do it alone. That means new ways of working.”

The new way of working requires a partnership between out-of-school time professionals and school administrator to use the best practices in high quality OST programming to develop an effective ELT program as a strategy for school turnaround.

Research has shown that high quality OST programs are effective in supporting academic growth as well as increasing school attendance, re-engaging students in learning, and increasing the likely of grade promotion. OST programs develop a sense of belonging for students that lays the foundation for social emotional learning and provides opportunities for the development of 21st century skills necessary for career and college readiness.

Additionally, extended-learning time programs have been shown to be an effective strategy for turnaround schools when a mixed strategy implementation model is used in program design. ELT programming provides flexibility in the meeting the diverse needs of students. When implemented successfully, programs have shown significant increase in standardized test scores, provide more instructional time to ensure competencies are mastered, and allow for student collaboration. Furthermore, they provide additional and continued access to enrichment programming vital for social emotional learning and career and college readiness.

By combining a mixed strategy ELT implementation model with the six best practices in out-of-school time programming, administrators have a framework to develop and implement an ELT program as a strategy for school turnaround efforts.

The landscape of education is changing. With that change comes an opportunity to reimagine school day learning. As administrators are challenged with finding strategies to turnaround school performance, it is time that the work of OST and ELT are considered as viable educational tools. These tools will help administrators re-engage students, increase academic performance, and ultimately, prepare our students for tomorrow.

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