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SCHOOL'S OUT

Done right, more class time and good after-school programs spell better performance. But Chicago schoolchildren are short on both. Advocates are looking to change that.

Students pressed for time to learn—and so are teachers

By Lorraine Forte
Editor-in-Chief

During the week in which we finished this issue of *Catalyst In Depth*, Mayor Richard M. Daley went on record promising more chapters in Renaissance 2010. Meanwhile, teachers, principals, parents and students awaited the announcement of this year's list of schools slated for closure or turnaround.

Whatever the criticism of Renaissance 2010 and the turnaround strategy, one element of learning that many of the city's new schools have gotten right is time—more time, to be precise, with longer school days and longer years. Research has shown that extra time is especially beneficial in boosting achievement for low-income children. Yet a Consortium on Chicago School Research report found that CPS students are engaged in learning for only about half of the officially scheduled time in school. The research is from 1998, but Timothy Knowles, a former director of the Consortium who now heads the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute, says little has changed since then.

In the 21st Century, a school calendar that is a relic of the 19th Century just won't cut it. Nationally, the average school year is 180 days, and the school day is about 6½ hours. Here in Chicago, the year is 10 days shorter (a finding that prompted Deputy Editor Sarah Karp to note, "Now I know why my kids are out of school all the time, including every Friday in November") and the day is 45 minutes shorter. No wonder Chicago's scores on national tests remain subpar, even compared to other big-city, high-poverty districts.

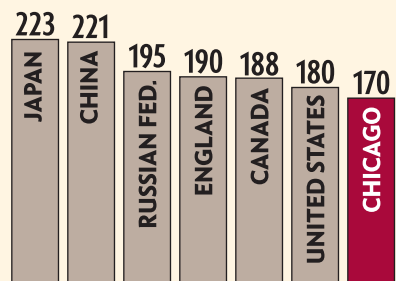
Time isn't the only factor, of course. But it is an essential factor. Schools don't operate on the theory of relativity, with time slowing down as speed increases. Trying to cram the same amount of learning—or more, for students who are behind—into 45 fewer minutes each day makes no sense.

To their credit, the mayor and the dis-

FALLING SHORT ON A GLOBAL SCALE

American children spend significantly less time in school than children in other countries. The comparison is particularly stark with other developed nations, where the school year can be up to two months longer. In Chicago Public Schools, waivers from the Illinois School Code bring student attendance days down to just 170—far less than national and international averages.

AVERAGE STUDENT ATTENDANCE DAYS



Sources: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Illinois State Board of Education

trict recognize that all children, not just the small percentage in new and turnaround schools, should have more school time. The district tried unsuccessfully to extend the day during the last contract negotiations with the Chicago Teachers Union, but didn't offer extra pay. (The union says it supports a longer day, with appropriate compensation.)

Encouraging signs are on the horizon, though. Extended learning time for struggling schools is expected to be part of the state's pitch for Race to the Top funds. And top CPS officials are considering strategies to add more time to the day, perhaps through a variety of budget and staffing models that schools could adopt.

After-school programs, which add time for learning and enrichment activities, should also be part of the mix. The Out-of-School Time Project, an initiative that aims to create a citywide system of after-school programs, is collecting data on the city's hodge-podge of programs and laying

the groundwork for training and support to improve quality. One interesting idea that has emerged from the Project is to have any new funding follow the child—in effect, giving families vouchers they could use at the activity of their choice, be it a class offered by a dance company, sports offered by the Chicago Park District or tutoring offered by a school. Teachers and parents first would talk about what activity might be most beneficial for the child.

STUDENTS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES short-changed on time. Teachers need time too, to come up with challenging lessons, talk with colleagues about teaching practice, observe each other in the classroom or even just “break bread together” to establish a sense of camaraderie that benefits the school, as one principal puts it. Smart principals find strategies to build collaborative and planning time into the day, even if that means taking over a class themselves so that every teacher at the same grade level can meet regularly for an hour.

Just as other countries offer more learning time for students, they also offer more planning and training time for teachers. American teachers typically have three to five hours of planning time per week built into the school day, compared to 15 to 20 hours in most European and Asian countries, according to a National Staff Development Council report from Stanford University researchers. Chicago, again, is at the low end of the scale; elementary teachers are entitled to three preparation periods per week under the union contract (which adds up to about three hours).

Teachers can, and often do, stay after school or work on weekends to plan lessons, grade papers and attend training. But any longer day should incorporate enough time for the type of regular, intensive professional development and planning time that the Staff Development Council recommends to help teachers improve and students learn. Demanding a longer day from teachers would cost more, but could also make teaching more valued and respected as a profession. ■

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Include the writer's full name, title and contact information for verification. Letters should be limited to 200 words and may be edited for space and clarity. Send them to the attention of the Editor.



Members of the Out-of-School Time Council play a game to gauge their knowledge of current events. Convened by Mikva Challenge, these young adults are charged with providing recommendations to officials about how to make after-school programs more attractive to teens. [Photo by John Booz]

A matter of time

Research supports the benefits of more classroom time for low-income children, especially when the time is used wisely. But Chicago has one of the shortest school days and years in the country. Now, leaders are looking to Washington to help extend the school day.

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9 Not just an add-on

Chicago has been a national leader in promoting after-school programs, but ensuring access and quality is still a challenge.

11 Making after school cool

Teens are least likely to participate in after-school activities, and advocates are looking for ways to get them more engaged.

ON THE COVER: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOE GALLO

LISTEN UP

The 2009-2010 Chicago Schools Policy Luncheon Series presented some of the major voices in the learning time debate. You can listen to them by going to www.catalyst-chicago.org and clicking on the links in the "Chicago Amplified" box, which are brought to you by our collaboration with WBEZ-FM.

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- By the minute, Chicago teachers rank high on pay scale
- After-school programming spread unevenly across the city

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A matter of time

Compared to national averages, the Chicago Public Schools school year is 10 days shorter and the school day 45 minutes shorter. Research shows low-income students stand to gain the most from extra learning time, and district and state officials are planning bids to win federal funds to pay for it. By John Myers

In Chicago, where the school day is short, Marquette Elementary Principal Paul O'Toole did something unusual: He spent about \$170,000 in grant money last year to extend the school day by one hour for middle-grade students, bringing their daily instructional time more in line with national norms.

Marquette's experiment was not an instant success. Teacher assignments had to be shuffled, in part because the school departmentalized at 7th and 8th grade, and teachers had to master new lessons. Despite the additional learning time, test scores were flat in 2009: Marquette's 6th- through 8th-graders scored below district averages on value-added measures (which compare a school's gains on state achievement tests to demographically similar students elsewhere in the district).

Still, Marquette remains committed to the effort at least until 2011, when grant funds from Atlantic Philanthropies run out. O'Toole has reworked student and teacher schedules this year to curb suspensions—which rose because students were acclimating to a new discipline system and a longer school day—and make better use of the extra time.

O'Toole points out that new learning strategies do not always show results right away, and that research strongly supports the benefits of extra time. Already, suspensions are declining, he adds. "Hopefully, we'll see a rebound this year

and continue to see a dramatic improvement in student behavior."

Marquette's experience illustrates a host of studies that show extra learning time can benefit students, especially low-income students, but results depend on how the extra time is used. A *Catalyst Chicago* analysis of statewide data echoes that idea: The 100 Illinois school districts with the most learning time posted only moderately better student performance than the 100 districts with the least time. Research from the 1990s shows only a small correlation between improved learning and more time in school, and suggests that "time-on-task" (the time a student spends actually engaged in lessons) is far more important.

Good classroom management can maximize more time-on-task. But a 1998 report by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, based on classroom observations of more than 200 teachers, found that even the most organized and effective teachers simply could not provide enough instruction to make up for the short day.

Another concern: Schools have adopted a laser-like focus on reading and math because of the pressures of No Child Left Behind, leading to a narrowing of curricula, experts believe. The dilemma is compounded by a truncated school day. *Catalyst* found that Chicago's 8th-graders spend a much higher percentage of their school day on language arts and math compared to their peers across the state.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Research suggests low-income and minority children benefit most from additional learning time, yet Chicago Public Schools has one of the shortest school days and years in the country. On the bright side, leaders here and across the nation are calling for extra time in school and federal funding could materialize to pay for it.

- Chicago's typical 9 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. school day is shorter than any other school day in Illinois and, over a year's time, adds up to a month less than comparable urban districts like New York.
- After-school programs offer a chance to boost time for learning and enrichment, and help build students' self-esteem. But participation is spotty, especially for teens. Budget cuts have hit some programs hard.
- Charter schools offer substantially more learning time, but they enroll just a small percentage of students.
- Research shows good planning is essential to making the best use of extra time.

"That's incredibly problematic," says Jennifer Davis, president and CEO of the National Center on Time & Learning, a Boston-based group that advocates for more school time. "If we need more time to make sure kids are proficient in [reading] and math, it shouldn't cut into other subjects and enrichment opportunities."

Davis, who has helped several schools in Massachusetts plan a longer school day, offers one fundamental lesson: "The more thoughtful a school has been about how to add time, the more successful it has been. Identify an educational focus and try to keep that at the heart of the redesign process."

That's an important lesson for Chicago, where a political drumbeat for more school time is building in tandem with a call by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan for extended-learning



During a daily “circle of power and respect” exercise—the centerpiece of Marquette Elementary’s new disciplinary strategy—Tyriek Kirkwood (left) tells classmate Valerie Diaz that he appreciates “committed” friendships. The school implemented the behavioral approach while simultaneously extending learning time by one hour for all 6th- through 8th-graders. Suspensions are down, and Principal Paul O’Toole believes the extra learning time will translate into better student outcomes this year. **[Photo by Ronnie Wachter]**

time in high-poverty districts. A *Catalyst* analysis found that Illinois districts with the least learning time are more likely to serve poor students of color. And research by The New Teacher Project and Education Resource Strategies has found similar results across the country.

“The students that really need the time the most are getting less time in school,” Davis notes. “Their [higher income] peers are also getting very significant enrichment programming outside of the school day, so it’s a double whammy for low-income kids.”

Potentially, federal dollars could solve the problem of how to pay for more school time. Meanwhile, some schools in Chicago and elsewhere across the country are experimenting with models that give students more time without a huge price tag.

THE 1998 CONSORTIUM REPORT explains that Chicago’s short school day dates back to 1969, when schools adopted closed campuses because of safety concerns—eliminating recess, shortening

lunch and cutting time at the end of the day.

But as the Consortium’s research makes clear, significant chunks of the school day are eaten up by administrative activities. The typical closed-campus schedule allows just 37 minutes for lunch and other non-instructional activities, but the Consortium estimated that at least 50 minutes are needed.

Chicago students are shortchanged even more by the annual school calendar, which includes 10 fewer days than the state’s annual minimum requirement of 180. The Illinois State Board of Education allows districts to use up to four of the 180 days for staff development and up to two for parent-teacher conferences. On average, Illinois districts have a 175-day calendar. But CPS has a waiver from ISBE to use four additional days for school improvement planning.

Factoring in the loss of more time because of testing, holiday celebrations and other activities, the Consortium estimated that Chicago schoolchildren are engaged in learning for just half of the officially scheduled time in school.

Timothy Knowles, director of the University of Chicago’s Urban Education Institute and a former director of the Consortium, says little has changed since the 1998 report.

“There’s just not enough time, in under six hours, to get done what needs to be done to prepare kids for the world as we now know it,” Knowles says. “That’s not to suggest doing the same thing for more time, but doing things that we do know work—with more time—is critical to prepare students for post-secondary education and [global competitiveness in the job market].”

From a mathematical perspective, the situation is a little better in the city’s high schools, where scheduled class time exceeds 330 minutes a day. But some educators, including the district’s executive director for school turnarounds, Donald Fraynd, point out that 46-minute class periods are too short to fully engage students and to accommodate administrative tasks.

As a result, Fraynd has introduced block scheduling in turnaround high schools. With this schedule, 90-minute classes meet four days

HOW CHICAGO CHILDREN LOSE TIME

Illinois law requires school districts to have 180 days—the national average—on the district calendar. However, the state also allows attendance days for students to be cut by up to 6 days. Chicago has an additional waiver for four days of improvement planning.

180 days

required by the state

- 4 days

for teacher institute days

- 2 days

for parent-teacher conferences

- 4 days

for school improvement planning

170 days

of actual instruction for students

NO TIME TO TEACH

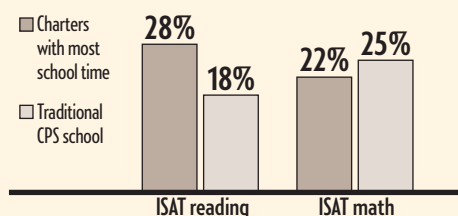
As a result of its short school day, Chicago Public Schools offers fewer instructional minutes (time spent on teaching) than other districts in the state and nation. The 5-hour, 45-minute day is about 45 minutes shorter than the national average.

DISTRICT	Days in year	Annual hours
Philadelphia	181	1,253
Los Angeles	180	1,231
Dade County—Miami	180	1,183
New York City	182	1,173
Clark County—Las Vegas	179	1,149
Chicago	170	873

MORE TIME, MORE LEARNING IN CHARTERS

Elementary charter students spend an average of 11 days more per year and 105 minutes more per day than their counterparts in traditional schools. But without information on the time charters allocate to non-instructional activities, it's difficult to compare actual teaching time. A *Catalyst Chicago* analysis found that charters with longer days and years were somewhat more likely to score well on value-added measures for the Illinois Standards Achievement Test. A “green” rating signals that a school performed better than expected on the ISAT.

SCHOOLS WITH A 'GREEN' RATING



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, National Center for Teaching Quality, Illinois State Board of Education; *Catalyst Chicago* analysis of CPS directories, value-added scores and ISBE data



each week; on Wednesdays, students attend 30-minute classes and are dismissed early so that staff can attend weekly collaboration meetings. Fraynd would like to see other schools adopt the change through union contract waivers.

Ed Klunk, a veteran Chicago educator and consultant for the Office of High School Programs, raises another concern: ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared for longer classes. Klunk says some selective high schools, which are known for attracting top teachers as well as students, have had success with the model, but previous efforts failed at some neighborhood schools, such as Manley.

Knowles, who previously served as deputy superintendent for teaching and learning in Boston Public Schools, says that similar efforts there produced mixed results. “It really comes down to the quality of teaching,” he says. “Things like block scheduling emerge, disappear and reemerge. The more successful [schools] had a very clear sense of the kind of teaching they were after.”

At the elementary level, some schools have pushed back against the district’s tight schedule. Teachers at Lincoln Elementary in Lincoln Park rejected the district’s request last year to adopt the standard closed-campus schedule; officials had hoped to save money on busing and asked Lincoln to switch so that bus schedules could be synchronized among schools.

Lincoln’s teachers turned thumbs-down on the plan, fearing the school would lose its “unique professional culture” and opting to continue taking their lunches during school hours. Principal Mark Armendariz says camaraderie is established when teachers “break bread together.” Teachers also didn’t want students to lose recess.

“The students are refreshed here,” Armendariz says. “They run to their heart’s content, and [afternoons] are more focused because they haven’t been sitting in a seat for six hours straight.” The longer lunch period is good for parents, too. Armendariz encourages families to use the time for medical and other appointments so that students are not pulled out of class.

At Cameron Elementary in Humboldt Park, Principal David Kovach says teachers voted three years ago in a landslide to add 20 minutes of unpaid time to their work day. The time is not used for teaching; instead, teachers get extra planning time while students are at recess.

Similar waivers have been adopted at a handful of schools, including Uplift High, which narrowly accepted a waiver to increase the day by 20 minutes this year. More schools, however, have adopted another schedule modification that doesn’t technically add to the workday—but doesn’t add more learning time either. The modification adds 15 to 30 minutes to the school day and “banks” the extra time so that students



Dancers from an after-school program run by social service agency Youth Guidance perform at a fundraiser to send their classmates to Ghana over spring break. Enrichment activities such as these can help raise achievement and are especially important for students in Chicago, where the school day is short. [Photo by Ronnie Wachter]

are dismissed early once or twice a month while teachers attend staff planning meetings.

NO MATTER HOW IT'S CUT, these are minor changes. Adding significantly more learning time—for example, an extra hour or more per day—will likely require union negotiation and more cash.

The Chicago Teachers Union says it supports more school time but demands “fair compensation.” That position put the brakes on a proposal made during contract talks in 2007, when financially strapped district officials reportedly asked teachers to accept a 45-minute extension of the day, sans extra pay. The next contract negotiations are in 2012.

Yet a firm cost for additional learning time is difficult to pin down. The CPS Office of Management and Budget estimates that it would cost about \$280 million to add one hour to the day with the current school calendar, and another \$25 million to add one additional day to the school year. Those estimates, however, simply assume that all staff would be paid salary increases in direct proportion to the increased time.

But a 2008 report by school finance expert Marguerite Roza from the University of Washington estimated much lower costs. Adding about

two hours to the school day represents roughly a 30 percent increase in time, but could cost a district just 6 percent to 20 percent more in salaries, depending on the staffing model. For example, Roza found that relying on paraprofessionals to work with students would cost about 6 percent more, while paying stipends to a few teachers who opt to work a longer day would cost 12 percent to 15 percent more.

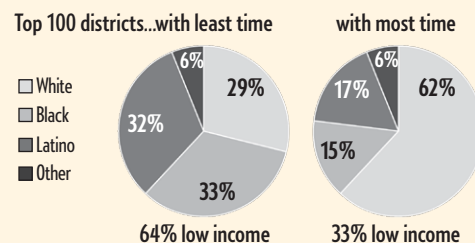
Other options would be cost neutral. Brooklyn Generation High School in New York has added 20 days to its school calendar by staggering vacation schedules for teachers. School leaders were able to contain costs and keep teachers’ work hours in line with New York norms, according to Melissa Lazarin of the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank based in Washington, D.C.

Similarly, the United Federation of Teachers charter high school in New York simply shifted the start times for half of its teachers to add 30 minutes to the school day.

Roza, a proponent of per-pupil funding, says large districts could adopt the budgeting approach to target money to individual schools and allow leaders to decide the best and most efficient way to add time to their day.

LESS SCHOOL TIME FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

In Illinois, most students are enrolled in school districts with short days—a sign that Illinois might want to make extended-day learning a key part of any bid for federal incentive grants under the Race to the Top program. Minority and low-income students are enrolled at disproportionately high rates in these districts, a statistic that holds true even when excluding data from CPS, the biggest and most diverse district with the fewest instructional minutes.

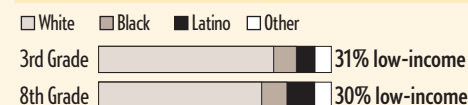


	White	Black	Latino	Low income
LEAST TIME				
City of Chicago 299	9%	46%	41%	83%
Berwyn South 100	16%	3%	77%	66%
Bloom Township 206 (Chicago Heights)	17%	57%	22%	72%
MOST TIME				
Plano 88	45%	7%	38%	36%
Avoca 37 (Wilmette)	66%	1%	4%	6%
Thornton Fractional 215 (Calumet City)	17%	65%	16%	49%

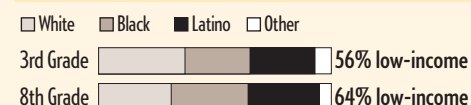
LESS TIME, NARROWER CURRICULA

Some educators worry that under the pressure of No Child Left Behind, schools are devoting too much of the school day to basic curricula and test preparation. A *Catalyst Chicago* analysis of state data for 2009 validates that concern: Low-income children of color are more likely to be enrolled in schools that devote a higher percentage of their day to math and reading/language arts and less time on other subjects, including science and social studies. Chicago schoolchildren spend more time on math and reading than the vast majority of students elsewhere in the state.

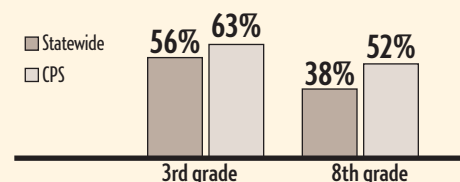
ENROLLMENT IN DISTRICTS SPENDING LEAST TIME ON BASICS



ENROLLMENT IN DISTRICTS SPENDING MOST TIME ON BASICS



TIME SPENT ON MATH, LANGUAGE ARTS



Source: *Catalyst Chicago* analysis of 2009 Illinois School Report Card and Illinois State Board of Education data



Melina Hernandez works on a painting in an after-school program at Gage Park High. With such a short school day and year, Chicago schools tend to focus on the basics, such reading and math, leaving little time for the arts and elevating the importance of after-school activities. [Photo by John Booz]

In Chicago, CEO Ron Huberman says he hopes to implement per-pupil budgeting here in the next few years. (Top officials under former CEO Arne Duncan had similar plans that fell flat.) That might include “pricing out” various models for added learning time that schools could adopt, according to staff in the budget office.

At the very least, schools looking to add time can leverage a change in the 2007 teachers union contract that curbs costs for some after-hours activities by setting a flat rate of \$33 an hour for non-instructional work activities. That change helped the Academy for Urban School Leadership offer more time at its contract turnaround schools.

Tim Cawley, AUSL’s chief of operations, says the organization wanted to add time at its 11 campuses last year, but found the cost—an estimated \$52,000 for each instructional minute—out of reach. (AUSL now has 14 campuses.) Instead, AUSL opted to spend extra cash so that teachers could spend an additional hour on collaborative planning each week. AUSL also spent additional funds to provide students a voluntary 10 minutes for breakfast each morning. (The district now offers universal breakfast, and AUSL is following suit.) Teachers are paid for supervision and, to maximize learning, ask students to read quietly.

“We know the cost of that hour and those morning minutes,” Cawley says. “We take it very seriously.”

FEDERAL FUNDS COULD POTENTIALLY BREAK the cost logjam. The state is aiming to get its share of \$4.3 billion in Race to the Top grants for states, while Chicago, and nonprofit groups like AUSL,

could win funds via the \$650 million Investing in Innovation grant, known as the “i3 Fund.”

Moreover, the National Center on Time and Learning is backing the TIME Act, a bill promoted heavily by Massachusetts Sen. Ted Kennedy before his death. The original bill, shepherded now by Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa and Rep. George Miller of California, called for a \$500 million investment for extended-learning pilots in up to 10 states. The Center’s Jennifer Davis hopes to perhaps roll that proposal into a revamp of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Spokesperson Mary Fergus of the Illinois State Board of Education says state education leaders are planning to submit Race to the Top plans that call for extended learning time in what would be called Partnership Zones. Akin to Chicago’s turnaround schools, the model will employ dramatic intervention strategies at struggling schools. Fergus says it’s still unclear exactly how the extra time would be spent; perhaps on Saturday tutoring or simply more or longer days.

Huberman is also considering extended learning time as part of the district’s pitch for the i3 Fund grants. Sarah Kremsner, the district’s director for performance management, says extra learning time is a “core issue” and “absolutely on the radar” with top administrators, but she declined to give specifics.

As part of its performance management push, the Office of Extended Learning Opportunities, which works primarily with after-school programs, has been undergoing the grueling process of developing indicators to keep tabs on programs’ effectiveness. The move could signal more

cuts down the road, on the heels of deep cuts earlier this year. After-school programs are not mandatory, but are a major strategy for adding more time for educational and enrichment activities.

AT MARQUETTE, O’TOOLE IS PLOWING forward with the extended-day program, part of a larger \$18 million effort called Elev8 that has expanded after-school programs and health and social services for students and their families in five Chicago schools. (See *Catalyst In Depth*, Sept. 2008.)

Marquette is the only school to add an hour to the school day—a good way, says O’Toole, to ensure grant dollars help every student, not just those who sign up for after-school programs or use the school’s new health clinic.

This year’s fine-tuning includes re-scheduled art and gym classes, now held later in the day to help break up the afternoon. O’Toole also encouraged teachers to move one of the activities from the school’s new discipline program to the afternoon as well. In this activity, intended to head off fights before they start, students form a circle and tell each other what they like and respect about one another.

Now that middle grades are departmentalized, students rotate through extra periods of reading, math, science, social studies and languages.

Last year, an extra homeroom hour “gave us a good chance to build relationships with students,” says Courtney Rogers, a 6th-grade social studies teacher. But Rogers now likes the fact that students receive a double dose of instruction in several subjects. With the kinks largely ironed out, the extra time has become a powerful tool; Rogers says she finally has enough time during class to pull out maps out and plot data for lessons.

O’Toole says the school has won a victory by cutting suspensions. But Marquette is fighting an uphill battle to significantly raise achievement. According to the National Center on Time and Learning, high-poverty schools need even more time. The group recommends an extra 300 hours per year for low-income schools, about 90 minutes per day in a 180-day school calendar.

“An hour isn’t long enough,” O’Toole says. “It just puts us close to what other districts have.”

Knowles suspects that federal investments in extra learning time will likely impact a handful of schools, rather than entire districts, through turnaround efforts like the Partnership Zones idea.

“You’re going to see more examples like Marquette’s Elev8 program, but with the turnaround brand on the door,” says Knowles. “[That will enable] a subset of schools to lengthen the school day with some latitude for how they use the extra time. The big questions are, ‘Will it be scalable and will we see significant results?’”

Tell us what you think. Go to www.catalyst-chicago.org to leave a comment, or e-mail myers@catalyst-chicago.org.

Not just an add-on

After-school programs benefit low-income students by providing more time for enrichment activities that, in turn, can boost learning

By Sarah Karp

Sharquita Young puts her hands on her hip and talks fast as she recites a poem about freedom—being able to do what she wants and go where she wants. Sharquita is practicing her poem for an upcoming performance in a fundraiser for America SCORES, the group that organizes after-school programs at her school. Later, as she sits on a bench in her school’s cafeteria, Sharquita says she likes poetry, but her favorite part of after school is playing soccer. “When I go home, I go into the backyard and kick around the soccer ball,” says the slight girl.

On many levels, Sharquita’s after-school schedule sounds great—soccer three days a week, composing and performing poetry the other two days. She’s writing, thinking, getting exercise, gaining confidence and getting exposure to activities that she otherwise might not participate in. Research suggests that after-school activities are an important addition to the regular school day, especially for poorer children. Opportunities to dance, learn to play a musical instrument, play sports or get tutoring—all the activities that middle- and upper-class children take advantage of because their families can afford to pay—help boost learning and close the achievement gap.

Indeed, the Harvard Family Research Center advocates re-defining what is considered a high-quality education to include after-school programs as “complementary learning.” This position is shared by prominent educators who signed the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education platform, an effort that aims to have the federal No Child Left Behind Act revamped

to tackle issues outside of school.

“Schools need help. They need support,” says Priscilla Little, associate director at the center.

Mayor Richard M. Daley long ago embraced that notion and, with investment from foundations, worked on improving after-school programs. Chicago Public Schools leaders also see the importance of such programs. Under the tenure of former CEO Arne Duncan, the district dramatically expanded its community schools initiative, which seeks to make campuses a focal point of the neighborhood by keeping them open after-hours with activities and services for adults and children. (Chicago is home to the Federation for Community Schools, an initiative that is working to expand community schools throughout Illinois.)

Chicago is now seen as a national model, and high-level advocates are working to convince the state Legislature to create a dedicated funding stream for after-school programs.

But, even with the commitment of prominent leaders, piecing together the world of after school and

figuring out how to make it more cohesive has been difficult. More than 15 years after Chicago started this process, it is still difficult to figure out how many children are being served, where program are located and whether the programs offer quality activities.

The Chicago Out-of-School Time Project, created in 2006 and supported by \$11 million in grants from the Wallace Foundation, aims to create a cohesive, citywide system of high-quality after-school programs. Part of that money has gone to developing a shared information system to collect statistics on programs across the city, including the type of activity, participation and attendance. About 85 percent of programs citywide are now being tracked in the system.

Ultimately, city officials want to be able to use the information to evaluate accessibility and to impose some accountability measures.

The Project provided *Catalyst Chicago* with data that show 135,000 students participate in 33,000 publicly funded programs across the city—but there are disparities. For

one, teens, especially Latinos, are the least likely to participate in after-school programs. And accessibility is spotty: In Calumet Heights, for example, the Project’s data show just one program for every 100 children, while West Town has 19 programs for every 100 children.

The Out-of-School Time Project is still in the process of figuring out a significant piece of the puzzle: how many spaces are available in each program.

“AFTER SCHOOL IS A MIXTURE of contrasting elements: identifiable, and yet heterogeneous, vibrant and yet fragile, a protected space for play and exploration, yet increasingly burdened with compensatory tasks... Most staffs have little or no preparation in working for children.”

This was the observation of evaluators of Chicago’s first major push in the late 1990s to make after-school programming more cohesive. Publishing their report in 2001, the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall researchers noted that an initial infusion of Wallace Foundation money helped create more programs, but they were spread unevenly around the city and varied in affordability and quality.

By 2007, a Wallace Foundation-commissioned study by Public/Private Ventures and The Finance Project found that Chicago was further along than most other cities in crafting a coordinated after-school system, but still needed to develop a dedicated funding source. Hence, a group of advocates formed ACT (Afterschool for Children and Teens) Now. Leaders say they are working with lawmakers to get a bill introduced this spring.

Without a single source of cash, after-school programs are currently

WHY THIS MATTERS

Forty years of research has proven that after-school and summer programs for low-income students can help to close the achievement gap. Nationally prominent educators are calling for out-of-school learning time to be part of the next incarnation of No Child Left Behind. Chicago is seen as a leader in this area, but there are still issues to tackle.

- After-school programs are spread unevenly across the city, and there is no effective mechanism to ensure all students have access.
- Funding for after-school programs is a hodge-podge and comes from every level of government as well as foundations and individuals. Advocates want Illinois legislators to create a dedicated funding stream, a tough sell in a cash-strapped state.
- To be effective, after-school programs must provide high-quality learning and enrichment activities. But there is no single definition of quality or how to measure it, and getting heterogeneous programs to agree to common standards is a difficult task.



Members of the Out-of-School Time Council play a game that teaches them how to work together around a common goal, an important skill for their work advising the city about how to improve after-school programs. [Photo by John Booz]

funded by a mix of government entities, foundations and individual donors. The result can be a maze as organizations aim for different outcomes, from violence prevention to increasing the graduation rate, says Harry VandeVelde, vice-president of development for the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago, which runs several after-school programs.

In addition, low-income parents can get a child-care subsidy to pay for after-school care for children under the age of 12, VandeVelde notes. But sometimes this only pays for babysitting.

Chicago Metropolis 2020, a membership organization that includes prominent business, civic, religious and government organizations, is involved in ACT Now, says Paula Wolff, a senior executive for the organization. But before a formal proposal comes forward, some points need to be decided.

First, what constitutes an after-school program? "Is it a dance class in the basement of a church?" Wolff asks, noting some activities wouldn't meet an advocate's definition.

And, what constitutes quality? "We need some rigorous methods to ensure that we are getting what

we pay for," Wolff says.

The Out-of-School Time Project has come up with a definition. "We are looking for structured, sustained and sequenced programs," says James Chesire, director of the project. In other words, there should be a plan for what is to occur (kids shouldn't just come and sit around), children should be expected to participate over a period of time (they shouldn't just show up one week and then stop coming),

and they should be able to get better in whatever they are doing and have increasingly challenging experiences in the program.

"If it doesn't have these things, it is not fulfilling the promise," Chesire says. Exactly how to evaluate programs is still up in the air, and Chesire admits there's a danger in making criteria too rigid. One of the wonderful things is the diversity of offerings in after-school programs in Chicago.

MANY TIMES, THE FIRST THING that staff talk about when asked about the value of their program is not increased test scores or even the exposure they are giving children. Instead, they talk about being a safe haven. "That is not a small thing," VandeVelde says.

Robert Pales, the principal of Henson Elementary School in North Lawndale, agrees.

"We are trying to keep them busy and off the streets," he says. Through the community school program, the school also is able to provide children with a warm, nutritious meal at the end of the day.

In North Lawndale, 30 percent of families live in poverty—a U.S. Census measure taken before the current recession. The community is in the third most crime-ridden police district in the city, according to the Chicago Police Department.

Pales and his colleagues in North Lawndale were so convinced that their students needed extra support that a group of principals got together in 2002 to create a non-profit to get community schools in nearly every neighborhood elementary. Now, the streets of this rough West Side community are virtually child-free in the afternoon, and the lights stay on in the elementary schools well after sunset on winter days. (The group of principals disbanded last year.)

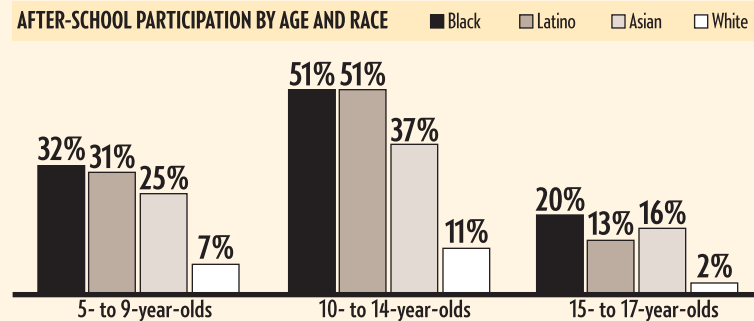
While the key thought in their head might have been to provide a safe place for students, Pales has also used the time to give his students a little extra academic help. For the first hour, all children must go to tutoring. After that, it's on to cosmetology, fashion design, football or arts and crafts.

At Gregory Elementary, Sharquita excitedly talks about all the different programs she's gotten a chance to go to. She's played chess and volleyball, and showed up Saturday morning to work on improving her writing skills for the essay section of the ISAT. She is a straight-A student, but voluntarily went for tutoring for the fun of it.

Sharquita says she has enjoyed the activities. "It is just much more fun than sitting around the house and being bored all the time." ■

FEWER TEENS IN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Participation in publicly funded after-school programs peaks for children between ages 10 and 14, then declines dramatically, especially among Latinos.



Note: Information includes children in programs run by the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District, After School Matters, the Chicago Public Library and community organizations. It includes children attending both CPS and non-CPS schools.

Source: Catalyst Chicago analysis of 2008-2009 participation data from the Chicago Out-of-School Time Project and 2008 population data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey

Making after school cool

From job apprenticeships to enrichment, after-school activities can provide valuable experiences for teenagers, but many stop attending

By Rebecca Harris

Crystal Lane, a 16-year-old sophomore at Gage Park High, failed a freshman math course. This fall, she joined a Caribbean dance class through After School Matters that helped her raise her grades by boosting her self-confidence, providing her with a place where she felt respected and giving her incentive to study harder.

Now Crystal is proud to show off her midterm progress report: all A's and B's. The class, she says, "is teaching me what I can do to make myself happy and make my family proud."

After School Matters provides high school students with paid apprenticeships in the arts, fitness and other fields. In terms of demand, it's one of Chicago's more successful programs, serving about 8,000 students each semester at more than 300 sites that often turn away up to twice as many students as they accept. The program draws students whose grades and attendance records are stronger than average, but a study by the University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children found that participating students had fewer course failures, better attendance and a better chance of graduating than a comparison group of non-participants.

This success is an exception, however. Participation in after-school programs declines sharply among teenagers, in part because of a shortage of resources.

When money is in short supply, elementary students are often first in line. "People decide to make sure younger kids have a safe place," says Jennifer Rinehart, vice president for data and research at the national Afterschool Alliance.

The proposed ASPIRE (After-

ON THE WEB

"It's a distraction from getting involved in gangs or drugs," says Javier Arriaga about the after-school program he attends at Chicago Commons' Paulo Freire Family Center. Yet he and other teens who participate in such programs say their friends don't join them because they don't know much about them or don't like that younger children attend. They also say programs are sometimes boring or too much like school. To find out more about what teens say they want in after-school programs, go to www.catalyst-chicago.org.

school Partnerships Improve Results in Education) Act would fund programs specifically for high school and middle school students. The Act has been introduced in the U.S. Senate and is slated to be introduced in the U.S. House. In Illinois, the ACT (Afterschool for Children and Teens) Now campaign is aiming for a bill that would create dedicated funding for after-school programs.

But demand is also a factor. Teens won't participate just because an adult tells them to, Rinehart notes. And in Chicago, a small number of the spots in teen-oriented programs remain empty, says James Chesire, director of the Chicago Out-of-School Time Project, a citywide effort to create an organized system of high-quality after-school programs.

Even some After School Matters sites have struggled with attendance. "Even though we offer a stipend," says David Sinski, executive director of After School Matters, "we find that if it's not a strong program, it's not going to keep kids coming back."

In general, many after-school programs don't engage teens or serve their needs. Robert Halpern of the

Erikson Institute believes that After School Matters is successful partly because its job-like structure—including pay, required attendance and high behavior expectations—leads adolescents to think about the process of becoming an adult.

His 2008 book "The Means to Grow Up" details his research into programs that use apprenticeships that engage young people in meaningful, adult tasks valued by society, rather than providing emotional support or life-skills instruction.

By exposing teens to adults who are passionate about their work, and to high standards, such programs help teens "begin to understand what they need to do to become adults, and [that] gets them to focus a little bit more on school tasks," Halpern says.

THE MIKVA CHALLENGE, an organization that promotes civic leadership in young people, is bringing teens and young adults into the mix through a recently formed Out-of-School Time Council that will advise the city and help advocate for more resources and better quality.

Still, "there is not a common awareness of what quality looks like for older youth," Chesire says. So the Out-of-School Time Project has turned to a research-based tool developed by the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. The tool evaluates programs on basics such as physical and emotional safety, as well as higher-level characteristics such as interaction, meaning the degree to which programs help youth develop a sense of belonging, participate in small groups, and act as facilitators and mentors. At the top of the pyramid is engagement—allowing young people to plan activities themselves, make their own choices and reflect on their work.

Programs for teens need to offer higher-level characteristics. "The older you are, the more important it is to go higher up on the pyramid," Chesire says.

To address the issue, the Out-of-School Time Project launched a pilot project in which 38 after-school sites volunteered to undergo a self-evaluation and external evaluation based on the assessment tool. After the evaluation, the sites were offered professional workshops and coaching on improving quality to better engage teens. An additional 30 sites are now receiving similar support.

The project also sought help from a California-based firm, Rescue Social Change Group, which in 2007 and 2008 had hired teens in Chicago to interview their peers about after-school activities; the interviews revealed a number of features that turned teens off, such as including elementary-age students in programs and not having expert adults to provide guidance and learning.

The interviews also revealed that students are attracted to programs based on the results they promise, such as service opportunities, academic success, career education, or social and cultural enrichment.

Rescue Social Change also created a toolkit to help after-school programs market themselves better. Twelve other sites that the Project deemed ready—sites with high-quality programs and extra space—received a two-day marketing training.

But ideas for a broader, regional marketing campaign based on the research have been shelved for now, Chesire says. If such a campaign worked, the city still doesn't have enough space in programs or enough funding to create them and meet the demand. ■

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