
Linked Learning:

Using Learning Time Creatively to Prepare Students for College and Career

An Executive Summary

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Linked Learning, a promising approach to high school reform implemented throughout California, often requires new and creative uses of time to improve outcomes for traditionally underserved students. *Linked Learning: Using Learning Time Creatively to Prepare Students for College and Career* highlights how high schools in four California school districts modify, and in some cases, extend the school day to more effectively prepare low-income students and students of color for college and career.

Background

According to the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 26 percent of the nation’s twelfth-grade students are proficient or advanced in mathematics and only 38 percent are proficient or advanced in reading.¹ Linked Learning, a California-led initiative, offers a promising systemic approach to reform high schools that is designed to address this perpetual and unsettling narrative for students in the Golden State. The multiple elements that make up this approach provide high school students with a rigorous academic core and real-world, and hands-on learning experiences. This report demonstrates how promising high school reform strategies like Linked Learning require the intentional and strategic use of time to accomplish ambitious goals for students who are traditionally underserved.

What Is the Linked Learning Approach?

Linked Learning is the blending or linking of core academic content with technical content and real-world application. Students select a career-themed “pathway”² that consists of four integrated elements:

1. A rigorous academic core with the goal of preparing students, without the need for remediation, for postsecondary education and employment.
2. A technical core of three or more courses that help students gain the knowledge and the skills needed for the workplace.
3. A series of work-based learning opportunities that begins with mentoring or job shadowing and evolves into internships or apprenticeships.
4. Student support services, such as counseling and supplemental instruction, that help students master advanced academic and technical content.

Why Increased Learning Time?³

The movement to increase learning time in public schools is growing. The number of schools that are significantly lengthening their school day, week, or year by at least 30 percent has grown to more than 1,500.⁴ A growing body of research suggests that more time in school is a promising strategy to increase student achievement, particularly for students who attend high-poverty, underperforming schools.⁵

Enhancing Learning Time Through the Linked Learning Approach

The Linked Learning approach requires students and educators to perform a myriad of tasks that do not fit neatly within the confines of the traditional school day. For example, the integration of rigorous academics and technical education requires more time for student work than provided in a typical class period. Moreover, students need time for internships and apprenticeships. In addition, teachers need time for collaboration and professional development for effective implementation of this new approach within high schools. Additional time further enables teachers to plan integrated lessons, group projects, and end-of-course assessments to codify and measure student learning.

Many high schools implementing the Linked Learning approach work within the existing structure of the school day but modify how time is used throughout the day. For example, some high schools alter the number of periods within the day and arrange the schedule to allow for groups of students to spend all or most of the school day together. Other Linked Learning high schools lengthen the school day and use the summer to provide more learning time for students and teachers. This report offers specific examples of the creative uses of time being employed in Linked Learning schools to provide students with a personally relevant, real-world high school experience in partnership with community-based organizations, local businesses, and institutions of higher education.

Findings

This report highlights implementation efforts within the Los Angeles, Oakland, Porterville, and Sacramento Unified School Districts. The students represented by these districts are disproportionately students of color and from low-income backgrounds.

A variety of methods were discovered within these districts to increase learning time for students and teachers; the most common approaches were (1) an expanded school day; (2) out-of-school learning time (before- and after-school programs); (3) summer learning; (4) common planning time and professional learning; and (5) work-based learning.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates how high schools can be both bold and innovative with their existing time to provide for deeper and more engaging learning experiences for students. The Linked Learning approach provides a promising strategy for altering traditional uses of learning time for improving the trajectory of outcomes for underserved students who have been ill-equipped to meet the demands of a twenty-first-century workforce.

The full report is available at <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/LinkedLearningTime/>.

Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1992–2013 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

² Students who voluntarily participate in the Linked Learning approach are enrolled in various industry-themed pathways in a wide range of fields, including engineering, healthcare, performing arts, law, and more. These students are referred to as “pathway students,” distinguishing them from their peers who are enrolled in the general student body and not participating in a pathway experience.

³ For the purposes of this report, the term “increased learning time” is used to capture (1) an extended/lengthened school day or year; (2) time re-ordered and used more purposefully within a traditional school day or year; (3) before- and after-school learning; (4) summer learning programs; (5) work-based learning programs; (6) time used for common planning time for teachers; and (7) more and better learning time.

⁴ C. Kaplan et al., *Financing Expanded Learning Time in Schools: A Look at Five District-Expanded Time Schools* (Boston: National Center on Time & Learning, (2014), <http://www.timeandlearning.org/?q=financing-expanded-learning-time-schools> (accessed September 30, 2014); Time to Succeed, “A Timely Movement,” <http://www.timetosucceed.com/?infographic> (accessed February 2014).

⁵ E. A. Patall, H. Cooper, and A. B. Allen, “Extending the School Day or School Year: A Systematic Review of Research (1985–2009),” *Review of Educational Research* 80 no. 3 (2010): 401–436.