TIME TO GROW:
Year Two Report on ExpandED Schools

An analysis of data from the second year of TASC’s national demonstration of an expanded school day for elementary and middle school students shows that ExpandED Schools improved school culture, decreased rates of students’ chronic absenteeism and helped students develop positive learning habits and attitudes. Schools and their community partners made progress in evolving the culture of their schools to maximize the benefits of expanded time for learning. For the second year in a row, New York City ExpandED Schools outperformed schools citywide in rankings by parents, teachers and students of their schools’ safety, communication, engagement and academic expectations.

INTRODUCTION

The 2012-13 academic year marked the second of TASC’s national demonstration of its ExpandED Schools initiative in 10 elementary and middle schools in New York City, Baltimore and New Orleans. Each school continued to partner with a youth-serving community organization, such as a settlement house or community development corporation, to add three hours to the conventional six-and-a-half hour school day. Together, principals, community partners, teachers, parents and students worked to redesign their schools to meet shared goals and deliver on the promise of a great public education for every child.

ExpandED Schools bring together the time, expertise and resources of schools and community partners to give disadvantaged students in urban schools more opportunities to develop their talents, more support to overcome the challenges of poverty, and more time to achieve at the high levels essential for success in the modern workplace. The teaching artists, coaches and other community educators who are standard in many middle- and upper-income children’s lives join the instructional teams at ExpandED Schools to give disadvantaged students a well-rounded education. Community educators back teachers by giving kids a glimpse of exciting life possibilities that lie ahead for those who invest effort in their education and develop leadership and teamwork skills. School teams collaborate to deepen instruction and expand opportunities.

TASC provides ExpandED School teams with a framework, coaching, tools and funding support to incorporate these four core elements into their redesign:
• More time for a balanced curriculum
• School-and-community partnerships
• Engaging and personalized instruction
• A sustainable cost model

Findings in this report are based on official student data, as well as school visits and observations by TASC staff members and reports to TASC from staff members at schools and community organizations. In addition to TASC’s analysis, we incorporate findings from the multi-year external evaluation of ExpandED Schools by Policy Studies Associates (PSA). In the first year of the demonstration, PSA’s researchers developed a rubric to measure fidelity to the ExpandED Schools model. In the 2012-13 school year, PSA again conducted interviews and observed learning activities, rating each ExpandED School’s level of implementation using the rubric. The external evaluators also administered a survey designed to capture changes in students’ learning habits and attitudes – in other words, their academic mindsets.

FINDINGS

1. ExpandED Schools align educational enrichment activities with learning goals & consistent youth development approaches.

PSA external evaluators found that nearly all ExpandED Schools rated “high” or “excellent” in delivering curriculum that was collaboratively and strategically designed to meet student needs. Schools and their community partners strengthened their collaboration under the principals’ leadership and cultivated learning opportunities designed to connect academic curricula and enrichment activities. There was growth in seven of nine1 schools from Year One to Year Two in this area, providing evidence that it takes time and continued effort to build the strong, sustainable partnerships that are required for a balanced, aligned curriculum for all students.

2. Students have more time not only for math and English, but also for science, social studies, enrichments and healthy meals in ExpandED Schools.

ExpandED Schools offer students at least 35% more learning time than in the traditional 6.5-hour public school day. Compared to those traditional schools, students at ExpandED Schools had more time for core academic subjects as well as arts, sports, social and emotional development and healthy meals. Schools offered enrichments including technology skills, dance and instrumental music, gardening, foreign language and playwriting. Schools offered courses for accelerated students, such as algebra and book clubs, as well as opportunities for struggling students to build grade-level skills in math and English.

Time by Content Area in New York City ExpandED Schools

---

1 While 10 schools were evaluated, only nine had data from the previous years, as one was new in 2012-13
3. Students, teachers and parents consistently ranked ExpandED Schools higher than citywide averages on safety, communication, student engagement and academic expectations.

Each year, the New York City Department of Education administers a survey intended to assess each school’s learning environment. For the second year in a row, teachers, parents and middle school students rated ExpandED Schools higher than schools citywide in all four survey categories (see chart above).
4. Middle school ExpandED students feel supported and challenged.

Students in grades 6 to 8 in ExpandED Schools in New York City reported a more positive school experience than did students citywide. Nearly 100% of middle school students reported, “Most adults at my school help keep me on track for college or career” compared to 83% citywide. And 99% reported, “Most of the teaching staff at my school expect me to continue my education after high school” compared to 94% citywide. PSA found that many schools introduced students’ choice of enrichment activities within the school day as an opportunity to teach about responsible decision-making and to build persistence by working with students to stay in courses even if their preferences changed.

5. ExpandED Schools in NYC had fewer chronically absent students and more "super-attendees" compared to the city and to schools’ own previous attendance patterns.

While overall attendance rates stayed mostly flat, there was a decrease in the proportion of students who missed 20 days of school or more, and an increase in the proportion of students who had attendance rates 96% and higher (absent fewer than seven days). Between the 2011-12 school year and the 2012-13 school year, ExpandED Schools surpassed the citywide rates in both categories.
6. Academic impact was mixed in cities where Common Core standards applied to either curriculum or state tests, but not both; academic impacts were positive in the one city where curriculum and state tests were aligned.

Academic results were difficult to assess in a year when the curriculum of schools in New York and Baltimore did not align to state tests of math and English. The New York State Education Department administered a new state test based on Common Core standards in 2013. But in acknowledging that most teachers had not been trained to teach to the Common Core standards, state officials declined to evaluate teachers on these results. Further, NYC city officials urged the public not to compare previous years’ results to the 2012-13 scores as the tests were not comparable. While Baltimore City schools changed the curriculum, the city said it would not administer a new Maryland state test aligned to that curriculum until spring of 2014. In ExpandED Schools in these two cities, academic results based on state test scores were mixed.

In New Orleans, the one city in the demonstration where the curriculum aligned to state tests, students in ExpandED Schools outperformed peers in both math and English, as measured by the tests.

7. ExpandED Schools used academic data well to guide instruction among traditional school staff, but did not systematically use data to guide enrichment choices.

ExpandED Schools use various tools to assess student progress. Often through data inquiry teams, teachers and administrators used data to guide instruction, but did not routinely share data on student progress with community educators. This was a missed opportunity, as many had received training through TASC and their local intermediaries to integrate Common Core expectations into enrichment activities.

While schools and their partners aspire to a more effective exchange in this area, they reported frustration at not having adequate tools to gauge students’ progress in developing habits such as resilience, persistence and positive teamwork (an issue TASC is addressing this school year by developing new tools for schools).

8. ExpandED Schools build academic mindsets in students explicitly & implicitly.

Core to ExpandED Schools is the belief that schools and community partners are more effective if they work together (rather than as independent actors during and after the traditional school day) to help each student develop the “beliefs, attitudes or ways of perceiving oneself in relation to learning and intellectual work that support academic performance.” This is what the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research calls “academic mindset.”

PSA evaluators found that students in ExpandED Schools show strong academic mindsets. They observed many activities both before and after 3 PM that school teams had devised to build these mindsets. For example, social workers led discussions about social issues relevant to students, weaving in exercises designed to strengthen students’ social and emotional development. They observed educators using theater programs to build confidence and surface talents in struggling students, and using physical activity and relaxation techniques to create an environment for active learning and help students internalize self-regulation skills. They also saw school teams promote movement and mindfulness by integrating Tai Chi exercises throughout the school day so students could calm themselves when they grew frustrated, and wake up when feeling lethargic.
LESSONS LEARNED

1. Transforming a school’s culture, approach to learning and schedule takes continued investment over time.

Schools have been operating on the same schedule for decades. Changing how they use time and incorporate educators from the community does not happen in just one year or even two. Partnerships mature over multiple years of mutual planning, testing new approaches, recalibrating and working toward common goals to improve student outcomes.

Shared school-and-community leadership requires schools and their community partners to plan together and communicate continuously. The TASC framework calls for a principal-led team of teachers, parents and community partner staff to meet in the spring to establish goals and plot a course for the coming school year, and then to meet again during the school-year in five school-based planning sessions. Partners engage in a constant feedback loop regarding curriculum, enrichment activities, scheduling and staffing throughout the year, adapting to meet student needs and interests.

Even so, ExpandED Schools still struggle to achieve full understanding of this model by school faculty members. TASC continues to encourage planning conversations earlier and more often to give teachers, community educators and parents more opportunities to align their efforts and draw on the strengths each bring to their partnerships. TASC also sees promise in giving teachers and community educators time to train together to co-teach subjects such as science, which lend themselves to building on classroom topics through related after-school making and designing projects. Teachers and community educators are piloting that approach (which exposes students to an additional 100 hours of science learning each year) through a TASC four-school initiative called STEM Educators Academy (see TASC website for details).

2. Data used to make decisions can and should extend beyond grades and test scores to include assessments of learning habits, but schools need support and better analytic tools to achieve this.

In Year One, TASC heard from school partners that they needed better tools to assess students’ social and emotional development and help in analyzing relevant data scattered across many reports. Thus, in the spring of 2013, TASC piloted a survey for teachers and community educators to complete regarding students’ social-emotional competencies. The survey was intended to establish a baseline measure of how well students in each school fared with respect to their social and emotional skills.

TASC continues to encourage planning conversations earlier and more often to give teachers, community educators and parents more opportunities to align their efforts and draw on the strengths each bring to their partnerships.
TASC delivered these baseline results to schools and community partners to help them personalize learning for students and meet their holistic developmental needs. Staff members found that offering schools rich data packets was not sufficient to make them truly useful for the teams to adapt what they were doing.

In the 2013-14 school year, TASC had schools administer the surveys in the fall (and will again in the spring). This time, the TASC team adapted reports back to schools to include more analysis of the data collected on social and emotional learning, and more interpretation of what the data showed regarding schools’ strengths and weaknesses. TASC program officers now use these reports to lead coaching sessions with school teams to help them adapt their use of expanded learning hours. TASC sees an acute need for nationally normed, easily administered, sound assessments of social and emotional learning to be made available to schools and community organizations to help with this critical work.

3. Schools need better tools to engage parents effectively.

After PSA identified effective family engagement as an area for improvement at the end of Year One, TASC and its partnering intermediaries worked with ExpandED Schools teams to help them better articulate their family engagement goals. We found that schools pursue a long list of activities that are designed to engage families, but many staff members are not clear about the evidence base for these activities, or about which activities are most effective for solving which problems. TASC has published a guide that includes research-based tools, strategies and resources to improve family engagement in such areas as helping parents to develop skills to be leaders within their school communities.

4. Multi-year, large-scale funding for expanded learning time is necessary to support sustainability.

Just as in Year One, TASC and its partnering intermediaries in New Orleans and Baltimore worked to ease the burden for school-and-community partners that devote significant staff time to raising and reporting on several public and private funding streams. Our ultimate goal is for schools to receive a per-pupil allocation for expanded learning that alleviates the need for them to apply for competitive grants and report to multiple private funders and government agencies.

5. Community partners need targeted support to improve instructional strategies and practices.

As states and schools adopt new Common Core-aligned state learning standards, AmeriCorps members, tutors and other community educators who are leading art, science and other activities need professional development to support literacy across content areas and to ensure the activities they lead are goal-oriented, rigorous, engaging and supportive of lifelong learning habits. This requires more intensive training on pedagogical methods and strategies than has been customary. TASC sees federal Title II funds, intended to support school faculty recruitment and professional development, as a potential large-scale funding source to support this.

6. Whole-school implementation takes funding, planning and communication.

As originally conceptualized, the ideal implementation of the ExpandED Schools approach was for the school day to be redesigned for all students in the whole school. As the national demonstration has progressed over the past two years, TASC has seen that this takes time to build, especially in large schools that serve many hundreds of students.
An expansion of the school day in places has been phased in as funding became available. Research suggests that school redesign is most successful when leaders prioritize their goals for school improvement and focus on one or two features (such as personalizing instruction or integrating academics and enrichments) that are essential to school success, rather than trying to improve fidelity to all the core elements of the ExpandED Schools framework simultaneously.

TASC leaders believe such deliberate, targeted change, en route towards an ultimate long-term goal of whole-school implementation, is beneficial to achieving success. In many places, this includes a primary step of phasing in whole grades or specific cohorts of students in need of intervention before adapting a whole-school model.

ABOUT TASC

The mission of TASC is to expand the school day to give disadvantaged students more opportunities to discover and develop their talents; more support to overcome the challenges of poverty; and more time to achieve at the high levels essential for success in the global workplace. Since our founding in 1998 we have helped more than 621,000 kids, supported more than 564 public schools, partnered with more than 404 community and cultural organizations and colleges and trained 23,000 community members to work in schools.

For more information, please contact Saskia Traill, VP of Policy & Research, at straill@expandedschools.org or (646)943-8700.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Saskia Traill and Katie Brohawn of TASC. We are grateful for support for this national demonstration project from public and private partners including the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, Rona and Randolph Nelson, The New York Community Trust, New York Life Foundation, Open Society Foundations, The Wallace Foundation, New York City Council, New York State Education Department, New York State Office of National and Community Service and the United States Department of Education.