

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

Position Statement on Time in Relation to Student Achievement

Adopted January 16, 2003

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes that time is one of the basic resources available to school districts to increase student achievement. We expect students to graduate from school with more knowledge and skills than ever before. We expect teachers and schools to be more productive than ever before, focusing not only on the intellectual development of students, but also on their social, emotional and physical development. In order to meet these expectations, school districts must seriously study how they use time to expand educational opportunities.

The State Board of Education encourages schools to study thoughtfully and implement creatively a broad range of initiatives that (1) make better use of existing time by students and teachers; and (2) increase the amount of time allocated to academic activities for students and professional sharing and interaction among teachers and administrators. Such discussions and decisions should include input from all stakeholders to ensure that changes address the needs and conditions of the local community.

More Academic Time to Accomplish More

The State Board recommends that districts consider the adoption of one or more, or a variation, of the following options as they assess how to expand time to increase student achievement:

- a prekindergarten program which emphasizes readiness skills;
- a full-day and/or extended-day kindergarten which provides a developmentally appropriate program;
- an extended-day program that accommodates children from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. to provide families with viable and affordable before- and after-school care;
- after-school, Saturday-school, vacation and summer programs that offer students an opportunity to extend traditional, school-based learning beyond the school day (or week or year) and to explore new, less traditional areas of learning;
- an extended school day in which more time is devoted to core subjects; and
- an extended school year for students.

Many Connecticut school districts and individual schools have already implemented programs and schedules that increase time and enhance its use. While the number of summer programs and extended-day programs in the state is at an all-time high, all students should have these opportunities.

More Efficient Use of Student Time

As instruction in all grades has moved from a more teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered one in which the teacher facilitates students' learning by engaging them in guided discovery, the need for some longer periods of class time has become increasingly evident.

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Additionally, districts must take into consideration research that indicates that different age groups learn best at different times of the day. While adolescents are more alert later in the day, younger children typically are more alert in the early morning.

Finally, it is universally acknowledged that students must exercise and extend their classroom-based instruction through regular, meaningful, sustained practice and independent work outside of the classroom. For learning to take hold, it must be reinforced frequently and effectively through homework.

Accordingly, the State Board of Education recommends that local boards examine the educational needs of their students, their goals and programs of instruction, their current schedules and homework policies, and current research, and consider implementing:

- alternative schedules and reallocation of existing time at all grade levels, researching their implications before instituting changes;
- new elementary, middle and high school starting times to better coincide with students' optimal learning times;
- revised or new homework policies that require age-appropriate blocks of at-home reinforcement and practice of content and skills taught in school, recommending time allocations, guidelines for effective types of homework (including how adults and peers can assist), and suggestions for weekend and vacation homework;
- a review of the use of current technology, focusing on how technology can help teachers and students use time more efficiently; and
- a plan for making technology more available in all classrooms.

More Efficient Use of Teacher Time

The professional isolation of teachers frequently is cited as the most serious impediment to improved curriculum, instruction and assessment. It is imperative that schools provide more opportunities for substantive professional interaction — both formal and informal. This would provide teachers with the chance to find cooperative and collaborative solutions to common concerns. Accordingly, the State Board of Education recommends that local boards of education seriously consider the adoption of one or more, or a variation, of the following options to meet the professional needs of teachers:

- policies and schedules that encourage and allow for common planning time, peer observations, team teaching, videotaping instruction with subsequent viewing and critique, issue-focused faculty discussions, an individualized professional development program, cross-district grade-level meetings, research teams, course committees and multidisciplinary instruction;
- discipline-based staff development, focused on effective strategies of teaching for student inquiry and discovery using longer time periods and a variety of instructional techniques based on student learning styles and achievement data;
- policies that encourage and expect increased use of technology for administrative purposes (record keeping, grading, planning) and instructional purposes;
- an increased in-school working day to allow teachers sufficient time for professional activities, planning and collegial interaction; and
- a school year for the professional staff longer than the school year for students, with guidelines in place for the effective and efficient use of this time for professional development.

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Strategies to increase the amount of time and change how we use time in schools will require the involvement of community agencies, groups, family members and individuals. Parents and the broader community must articulate their belief in the importance of education. School districts must expand their views of community agencies and individuals as potential direct providers of programs and services within the classroom and school building. Moreover, we must extend the use of school buildings by the entire community during and beyond the school day and school year to meet educational and other community needs. We must keep in mind that the resources we invest in education directly affect the degree to which students succeed in school, higher education, careers and the community.

Time is one valuable resource that plays a critical role in this equation; it has an immense capacity to help increase student achievement. We must, therefore, capitalize on the use of existing time within the school day and school year, implementing creative and proven ways to allow for more and better instruction. We also must provide additional learning opportunities for students and professional development for teachers beyond the traditional school day and school year. These initiatives, supported by our collective commitment to improve education, will be a wise investment in our children.

References: *Prisoners of Time*, Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, April 1994

The Case for More Time and Better Use of Time in Connecticut Schools, by the Connecticut Academy for Education in Mathematics, Science & Technology, Inc., 1996