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Massachusetts First in the Nation to Expand School Day in Multiple Districts
5 Districts, 10 Schools To Expand Days Beginning in September, Will Add Enrichment Programs and Academic Time

Boston – Ten schools in five Massachusetts districts will expand their school day by at least 30 percent this September. With this announcement, Massachusetts becomes the first state in the nation to spearhead a multi-district effort to expand the school day in order to improve student academic performance and reintroduce enrichment programs that have been stripped from the school day. Massachusetts is the birthplace of public education and the state is once again leading the nation with new and innovative public education solutions.

Spearheaded by Massachusetts 2020, The Expanded Learning Time Initiative was included in the state's 2007 fiscal year budget at \$6.5 million. More than 4,700 students from grades pre-K-8 in 10 elementary and middle schools in Boston, Cambridge, Fall River, Malden and Worcester will benefit from the new school day. Schools will provide additional time for core academics, enrichment programs as well as professional development opportunities for teachers.

“These schools have worked extremely hard over the last year to develop engaging and creative plans to expand their school day and expand the learning opportunities available to their students,” said Jennifer Davis, Co-Founder of Massachusetts 2020, a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding educational and economic opportunities for children and families across Massachusetts. “Expanding the school day is not just about more time but about rethinking the day to create an inviting educational environment where students are excited about learning. This is a very important and exciting time in education. We look forward to helping these schools excel.”

The standards for students have been aggressively raised over recent years, yet students have not been provided the additional time needed to reach them. Mandatory testing in subjects such as math and English/Language Arts have forced many schools to significantly reduce the time dedicated to arts, music and physical education and often decrease time in other core subjects such as science and social studies.

“The educational achievement gap will never be closed within the confines of the traditional school day,” Davis said. “The school calendar used in most U.S. schools today is a relic created for the agrarian culture of the 19th century – not the competitive global economy of the 21st century. Students must be provided with the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to compete with their counterparts across the globe.”

Currently, Massachusetts lags behind most industrialized countries – including Turkey, Hungary, and Mexico – in instructional hours per week and total learning hours per year. In China, all students have 30 percent more time to learn than U.S. students currently have.

In addition to significantly increasing the amount of student time dedicated to academic study and enrichment, an expanded school day will provide teachers with a significant increase in collaborative professional development time so they can plan lessons together, develop higher quality curriculum, and review data in order to more effectively improve learning.

“These districts are undertaking the enormous challenge of completely redesigning the school day,” said Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll. “To do this right they will have to not just add time to the school day, but rethink their teaching practices, curricula and what they can do to better engage each child in their learning. This is an exciting initiative and I look forward to seeing the results in each school.”

Teachers and principals involved in the planning process expressed their enthusiasm over having additional time in core academics as well as having the time to teach creatively and involve their students in hands-on and experiential learning programs.

Some examples of how districts will utilize the expanded day:

In Malden’s Salemwood School, math classes will increase from 50 minute blocks to 90 minute blocks and English/Language Arts time will expand from 90 minutes to 120 minutes in order to offer more project-based learning and incorporate new and creative teaching methods. The Salemwood School will also add a new Academic and Creative Enrichment (ACE) program to their day, allowing students to explore areas of passion and interest. Students will choose between elective classes such as community service, debate, drama, media production, newspaper, sign language, book club and more.

The Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Boston will create a math league with small teams of students. Teams will practice together and compete against other teams to demonstrate their newly acquired skills. The Edwards Middle School will also provide two hours every day for students to focus on their individual interests through innovative electives such as a sports and writing program, musical theater or dance, community service and apprenticeship programs.

Schools in all five districts have also entered into innovative community partnerships to help support the new expanded school day and bring a wealth of community-based enrichment activities into the school.

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