

By Kim Farris-Berg

Let Teachers Design Better Ways to Use School Time

In the past three years, more than a million students have experienced Expanded Learning Time (ELT) initiatives granting at least 30 additional minutes per day (and/or 10 days per year) at school.

Where ELT is being implemented thoughtfully, there is outstanding potential to improve student achievement. However, merely adding instructional time isn't enough, researchers have found. Expanding time to do the usual learning activities leads to student and teacher fatigue.

That's why some ELT proponents are shifting their language to encourage "More and Better Learning Time" (MBLT). The important thing, they emphasize, is to use time in new and better ways: individualizing learning, making the most of student data, and building school cultures of high expectations and mutual accountability.

Early research suggests that when first-generation ELT initiatives had a clear plan for making better use of time, teachers were able to cover more content. Many schools built strong community partnerships that enriched student learning on subjects ranging from robotics and astronomy to drama and creative writing.

Other predictors of ELT success included 1) supporting teachers to implement new teaching strategies, and 2) getting buy-in from teachers, students, and parents. This particular factor has made reformers skittish. After all, teacher "buy-in" is no simple matter these days, given practitioners' justifiable skepticism of outside mandates.





However, what if MBLT proponents and researchers began emphasizing the potential of changes driven by the ultimate “insiders,” teachers themselves?

That’s what I proposed—with my Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) colleagues Barnett Berry and Lori Nazareno—in a report released earlier this spring by the National Education Association (NEA). Pointing to 35 districtwide MBLT initiatives in 10 states, we asserted that teachers unions should help their members secure a meaningful role in defining and implementing MBLT initiatives’ purposes. Teachers should also cocreate the policy and planning supports necessary to carry out MBLT initiatives well.

What strategies could state, district, and union leaders use to put teachers more in the driver’s seat? One recommendation is to draw on the experiences of those who have been participating in the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI), a partnership between CTQ, NEA, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Over the past two years, a significant number of TLI participants have launched bold new MBLT initiatives in their schools, districts, and unions. Their reportage and analysis have helped identify some cutting-edge approaches that

can help system leaders ensure MBLT initiatives’ success:

1. Give teachers more decision-making flexibility in their schools

Schools where teachers and administrators have decision-making autonomy around staffing, scheduling, and budget have fewer MBLT implementation challenges. Some districts and unions are already showing how to do this, having arranged autonomy agreements for teacher-powered schools that are designed and run collaboratively by groups of teachers. Teachers who work in these schools have consistently demonstrated that, when they call the shots, they already use time in new and better ways for student-centered learning (no formal MBLT initiative required).

2. Create hybrid roles for teachers

Schools with MBLT initiatives could have hybrid roles for one or two teachers to work part time as MBLT coordinators and part time in the classroom. These coordinators would be responsible for supporting their colleagues to implement new teaching strategies. They could also develop strong community partnerships to

provide enrichment activities that reinforce the learning goals of their school and district.

3. Develop relevant professional learning communities (PLCs) that are led by teachers

Teachers are generally very dissatisfied with their professional development—including their PLC participation—because of top-down execution. However, teachers who are introducing MBLT initiatives say they are profoundly impacted by PLCs that connect them with colleagues to share and troubleshoot their challenges. In these kinds of PLCs—some of which are conducted virtually and may bridge multiple schools—teachers learn to anticipate and resolve complications connected with MBLT reforms, such as navigating the power dynamics that exist in school systems.

To yield meaningful outcomes for students, MBLT initiatives must involve more than passing a new state law or approving a lengthened school day across a school district. Education leaders must find and use creative opportunities to **position teachers as experts and decision makers** in how to best use the time for high-quality teaching and learning. Otherwise, MBLT will join the graveyard of failed reforms: good ideas that flopped when implemented without practitioners’ expertise. ■

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Can Growth Mindset Theory Reshape The Classroom?

Growth mindset holds that every learner has the potential to excel. How could it impact education?

Great teachers have long known what research is beginning to prove: an individual's mindset—as much, or even more so than ability—can have a profound impact on their success in school and beyond.

However, until recently, noncognitive skills like perseverance and self-motivation sat at the periphery of an education debate centered on the measurement of skills like reading and math. That is beginning to change.

Books on noncognitive skills pepper best-seller lists. Policymakers have taken note of a growing body of research that proves our abilities and intelligence can be developed. The recent revamp of the federal K-12 education law, for the first time, introduced terms like “well rounded” into the policy lexicon, opening the door to inclusion of nonacademic factors in accountability plans.

The basic concepts are easy to grasp. Try asking someone if they were good at math as a child. It's interesting to hear how common it is for people to answer that question in finite terms—that they either have a mind for it or they don't.

This perception of intellectual “haves” and “have nots” is one that Lang Chen, a postdoctoral fellow in cognitive psychology and neuroscience at Stanford University, recently tested. Working with children aged seven to nine, he and other researchers used

a survey to identify those who enjoyed challenging math problems and had a positive view towards the subject, and those who felt the opposite. After then giving them a set of problems to solve, they found that students who had a positive view outperformed the children who didn't.

These children shared a trait that Professor Carol Dweck has termed “growth mindset”: a belief that their abilities are more like a muscle that can grow and flex, even if failure was met along the way.

Research shows that, when handled appropriately, even brief exposure to the concept of growth mindset can have a significant impact on the way students think about their ability to learn. However, like so much of education theory, the challenge for researchers isn't just to identify ideas that work, but to put them into action effectively in every classroom in the world.

Making things work at scale is something technology is good at. A genuine partnership between academics and technologists, one where technology helps make research accessible for all, has the potential to make a large difference in how learning happens. And we're already seeing it.

In a recent report, 96% of teachers in the U.S. said technology makes a significant impact in their classrooms. Together with greater high-speed internet coverage, this means teachers have an unprecedented



ability to find tools and resources that work for their classrooms. Teachers who want the best for their students are able to choose tools and resources that fit their classrooms.

Of course, turning research into practice is not easy. Dr. Dweck herself worries about the watering down of concepts like growth mindset. And, we believe technology on its own is not the answer. However, a world with a deep collaboration between technology and research can bring the best ideas in the world to the audiences most wanting them. We believe that is an exciting future indeed. ■

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eschoolnews.com.*

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A Quarter-Life Crisis for Public Charter Schools?

When a birthday milestone arrives, we take a hard look in the mirror. Do we like whom we see? What do we want to change?

We may also take a hard look around us, at our relationships, work, and accomplishments. Are we satisfied, or is it time for change?

Charter schools celebrate a milestone this year: 25 years. In our nation, 6,800 charter schools serve nearly 3 million students. Many of these schools are achieving extraordinary results.

However, instead of celebrating the contributions made by charters to public education over 25 years—and there is plenty to celebrate—I'd rather focus on what must change.

I'd call it a Quarter-Life Crisis: there's a war between charter school proponents and opponents. It's sucking up resources and slowing down progress for all children, and it should end.

To stop warring and start cooperating, both sides must honestly acknowledge our flaws.

Let's start with **Tolerating Bad Actors**. The biggest flaw of charter proponents is that we have tolerated bad schools and con artists for too long.

For example, some for-profit companies running charters engage in self-serving real estate deals, hide their financial practices from public view, claim they own assets purchased with public monies, and spend large sums to influence state legislators. Then there are virtual schools: most perform terribly yet continue to operate. We should not tolerate these behaviors.

An Island Mentality. For too long, charter school operators and proponents have had too little concern for how charters impact other public schools and students in our communities. We believed that each charter school could be an island unto itself.

This has produced some schools that will not enroll students in upper grade levels, others that counsel children out mid-year, and even some that tell families of students with disabilities that their school cannot serve them. Some charters have relied on other public schools to be the safety net. That's not right. If we believe that charter schools can provide a better education, we need to include all children.

Finally, a **Lack of Community Voices**. Though well-intentioned, charter school boards, advocacy groups, and funders have not been representative enough of the communities that schools are serving.

Let's be real: this is a movement led primarily by white middle-class and wealthy individuals, primarily serving low-income communities of color. I am one of those white, middle-class people; I worry that my colleagues and I don't truly understand the experiences and values of the communities our schools serve. Too often, we've resisted including their voices in our organizations.

This extends to teacher voices. Al Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers and the original proponent of charters, saw them as a way to empower teachers. In fact, the nation's first charter school law—25 years ago—required a majority of a charter board to be teachers at that school. Let's support more





teachers to start schools, and honor a pillar of the charter philosophy: more innovation and empowerment.

These three flaws—tolerating bad actors, an island mentality, and a lack of community voices—have led some to resist, condemn, and oppose charter schools, despite their proven success. However, before charter school opponents get too comfortable in their condemnations, here are three flaws of the opposition.

First, the **Profit Myth**. Charter school opponents have manufactured and perpetuated a myth that a handful of wealthy philanthropists—Bill Gates, the Walton family, Eli Broad, and Wall Street hedge fund managers—are getting rich off charters and trying to destroy public education. In reality, these individuals have generously donated to improve many aspects of public education, including, but not limited to; to charter schools. We should applaud, not condemn, them.

Stuck in the Past. Let's stop romanticizing the good ol' days. Our current, outdated public education system was built in the early 1900s—an industrial model of top-down centralization and standardization. It may have worked for the white middle class of the 20th Century, but its neighborhood school model never worked for low-income children of color. In city after city, schools in African-American and immigrant neighborhoods were dilapidated and underresourced. They did not help children escape poverty; they perpetuated it. We need to build a new 21st-century public education system that meets the needs of all children. We're 16 years into this new century: it's time.

Lastly, the **Blame Game**. Charters are blamed for the financial and academic failings of urban school districts. But this ignores the fact that districts have been failing for generations, long before charters. Charters did not create unfunded pension systems, nor force school districts to borrow money. Opponents have the cause and effect backwards: charters did not cause urban school districts to fail; districts failed and parents demanded better options, like charters.

There are plenty of flaws to go around. But what is truly shameful is this: for 25 years, charter school proponents and opponents have been saying the same things and making the same mistakes.

It's time to end the rhetorical wars and work together to make all schools work for all children. ■

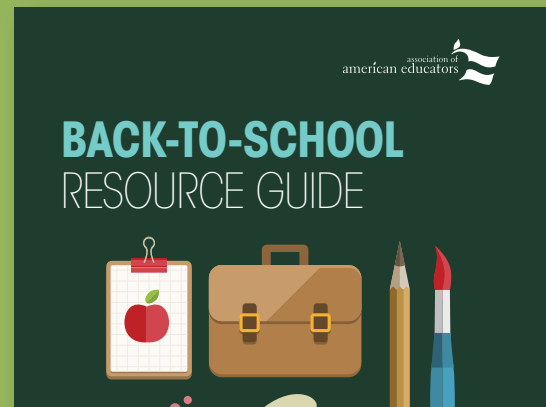
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Greg Richmond is the President and CEO of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and a leading voice in the nation's debates on public charter school quality, access, and accountability.

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Member Spotlight:

Check Out Danielle Knight's 8-Step Video Project for Teachers

Each year my class learns about Earth Day and citizenship. We make an Earth Day music video with our own illustrations. The kids love it!

This year, I used the song “Somewhere over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World” by Israel Kamakawiwo’ole. We used that song because it is perfect for seeing the world for the beautiful place it is! We also used the “Somewhere over the Rainbow” bit because we live in Kansas. It just fits!

Here’s how I do it:

Step 1: I use iMovie on my Mac laptop. If you don’t have iMovie,

then a simple presentation to the song will work just fine. Be sure to time the lyrics with the music. For iMovie, you need to upload the song and the pictures. Then you arrange them in order and give each picture a certain time so it changes with the music.

Step 2: I print out the lyrics at the bottom along with the page number (page numbers help SO much). It’s easier if you label the page numbers as you scan and place them together in a folder.

Step 3: We talk as a class about what the song is trying to say to its listeners. It’s amazing how kids can catch on to such an abstract idea!

Step 4: I give each student a page or two to illustrate. It’s perfect for their text-to-picture connection. Some kids need help reading the words and coming up with ideas to put on paper but once you brainstorm with them, their confidence skyrockets and their illustrations have amazing detail. They think of things I would never have thought about!

Step 5: After the kids are finished illustrating their pages, I scan them to my computer and put them into iMovie. One year I simply took pictures of their work and it came out fine, I just prefer the scanning.

Step 6: You can even put some fancy transitions and introductions to it.

Be sure to place them in as you go so your timed slides don't get messed up.

Step 7: Once it's finished, I post it to YouTube. But be careful not to include pictures of the kids and their last names!

Step 8: After I create the movie, I make the pages into a book. I laminate them, hole punch them, and put some binder rings through them. I place the book in our classroom library. I can hear the kids read and sing it together as they flip through it. It melts my heart. I also have some copies of the classes before them. They love to look and compare the books, too.

By the time it's all said and done, you will have listened to the song about 73 times but it's totally worth it. We love playing the video and singing together while feeling proud about what we can accomplish!

Check it out for yourself!

Tinyurl.com/MsKnightsVideoProject ■



Danielle Knight was born in Manhattan, Kansas, and graduated from Kansas State University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education K-6. Go Wildcats! She's been teaching first grade since 2012 and has taught in Junction City and Topeka, Kansas. She enjoys seeing their excitement in learning and watching little minds grow wild!



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AAE Teacher Survey of the Month

Do you consider yourself a reform-minded teacher?

▶ Take this one-question survey at tinyurl.com/aaejuly16survey today and be entered to win an AAE prize pack!—just for letting us know. You can also scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone!



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5 Simple Ways to Get Involved: A Back-to-School Message from AAE's Membership Team Director

Calling All AAE Member Teachers!

Summer is finally here but the fun is just beginning. As a part of the largest and fastest-growing professional educators association in the country, we are extremely proud to have been serving members like you for over 20 years and everyone here at AAE thanks you for being a part of our team.

In preparation for the upcoming school year, I wanted to share how dedicated teachers LIKE YOU can make AAE a stronger force in the fight for teacher professionalism this August! Below are 5 fun ways to do just that simply by sharing the AAE mission with your colleagues!

Contact me at any time and I'd love to give you some additional tips.

1. Find a good opportunity to spread the word. We all know

how busy teachers are but you know your school district best. Is there an upcoming professional development day or new staff meeting during which you could share for 5 minutes? Your testimonial makes the difference!

2. Like and share on social media. Help drive traffic to our website and critical teacher resources on Facebook at [Facebook.com/aaeteachers](https://www.facebook.com/aaeteachers), on Twitter at [Twitter.com/aaeteachers](https://twitter.com/aaeteachers), and on our blog at aaeteachers.org/blog.

3. Share AAE materials. Before school is back in session, share brochures with your entire staff in their mailboxes or in a teachers lounge so they have time to read them and ask questions before students start rolling in. Always include a membership application. We'll even send you materials for free when you place an order at aaeteachers.org/materials!

4. Share our AAE videos. Visit [youtube.com/aaeteachers](https://www.youtube.com/aaeteachers) to find clips that help teachers understand what AAE is all about!

5. Ask to share on your district's app or website. Host a meeting and share a districtwide email introducing AAE. This is truly relational and by sharing, you could certainly be saving a license and career.

Our staff is dedicated to providing you with all the support you need. Please contact us to help you plan a successful back-to-school strategy. NOW is the time to share!

Warm Regards,

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