

Time Matters Blog

Hawaii's Thoughtful Approach to Learning Time

By Blair Brown on April 22, 2014 - 9:00am

It is rare at the National Center on Time & Learning that we are in the position of supporting a proposal for less learning time for students. However, after taking a moment to understand the implications of [Hawaii's HB 1675](#), a bill that scales back required school time for Hawaii's students and which is moving through the legislature now, we do, indeed, find ourselves supporting the measure. As astute students of learning time may remember, a few years ago, Hawaii's Education Committee Chairs moved an ambitious bill through the Legislature that increased the minimum learning time all Hawaiian students to 1,080 hours annually. They took this bold step because they knew that Hawaii students needed more learning time to academic support and enrichment classes in their school day—key components of a well-rounded, high-quality education.

Yet, sometimes, a broad policy on increasing learning time is not what is best. Aside from the budget implications—universally raising the minimum number of hours includes a steep price tag of \$6.1 million per day—we are deeply concerned that such a broad-based approach will create severe implementation challenges. We have learned a lot over the years helping schools redesign and expand their school schedules, and one of the most important lessons is that when adding time to the schedule, it must be purposeful and thoughtful. Simply adding time to meet a mandate will likely mean educators have little incentive to generate deeper, strategic change. Instead, they tend to revert to tinkering: another worksheet in one class or ten more minutes of study hall. Meaningful instruction or learning will not take place if educators are not bought in and the added time is not structured in a way to make it matter.

That is not to say, though, that time does not matter. It does. It is important that schools have minimum annual hours and that all schools start from the same place. Then, if a particular school is struggling, administrators can understand what tools they have to help, including providing substantially more learning time. Perhaps a school community looks to expand time so that teachers have more time to plan and collaborate, teachers have more time to target interventions and students have more time for elective classes, or a school leader may look at instructional practices that have nothing to do with time. By setting a minimum calendar of 990 annual hours for secondary schools, Hawaii would be putting forth minimum requirements that are in line with—but not ahead of—several other states around the country.

So, in this case, it looks like the thoughtful approach towards assuring students in Hawaii are educated in schools that are optimizing their time with students is starting from a lower quantity, and then building up strategically from there. In this way, the legislature will help to make sure that those students who are most in need of more school time, might have the chance to gain that opportunity, rather than spreading the resource of time more broadly but with minimum effect.