

PASS 3: Strategies that Enrich and Expand Student Learning

Parents can Support Student Learning through Extended and Expanded Learning Opportunities

The PASS model refers to the term "parent" as any adult who plays an important role in a child's family life.

Educators and parents can create meaningful strategies that prepare students for deeper learning and an increase in their breadth of knowledge and skills to support classroom performance and college and career readiness. **Extended learning** times and **expanded learning** opportunities for students are experiences directly aligned with academic standards and classroom expectations. When students learn across a variety of times and settings parents are uniquely positioned to engage in the quantity and quality of their child's learning experiences.

Extended and expanded student learning structures provide parents with additional opportunities to develop PASS partnerships with educators to ensure that their child's specific needs are supported. Through their academic partnerships, parents and educators can create important strategies to enrich and support student achievement with deeper knowledge and experience.

Ideas matter. The language we use to convey ideas matters too.

The terms "extended" and "expanded" student learning opportunities are often used interchangeably. However, while there are clear differences, the most important factor is that extended and expanded student learning must always align to high academic standards and student achievement in the classroom.

Extended learning generally occurs as structured learning delivered by students' same educators at their same school. It allows for a deeper learning and extends for longer periods through a revised school day, week, or calendar year. Pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten extend the traditional K-12 grade spans and are considered extended learning.

Extending learning opportunities for students is a linear process where district administrators and Boards of Education usually develop the structure of school schedules, days, and calendars. However, PASS partners can share and consider ideas, opportunities, pros and cons, challenges, and problem-solve to provide critical input about providing students with the advantage of more learning time in school.

While the school decision-making process on the topic of extended learning structures may provide for parent input, PASS partnerships are an effective way to ensure that any extended learning structure meets the needs of students. The exception to an indirect decision-making role regarding extended learning for students is when parents of special needs students are equal partners on their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) team. PASS partnerships around extended learning opportunities are likely to be different from those of expanded learning opportunities for students.

An example of extended learning opportunities

Block scheduling is an example of one method to extend a class experience. Schools throughout New Jersey and the United States are adopting block or modular scheduling in dramatically increasing numbers. In contrast with the traditional daily six-, seven-, or eight-period schedule, a block schedule consists of three or four longer periods of daily instruction.

The three most common forms of block scheduling are:

- Alternate day schedule – where students and teachers meet every other day for extended time periods rather than meeting every day for shorter periods;
- "4x4" semester plan – where students meet for 4 90-minute blocks every day over 4 quarters; and
- Trimester plan – where students take two or three courses every 60 days to earn six to nine credits per year.

Some benefits of extended learning with strategies such as block scheduling:

- Teachers see fewer students during the day, giving them more time for individualized instruction;
- Students can utilize the increased span of teaching and learning time to engage in longer cooperative learning activities than can be completed in one traditional class period;
- Students have more time for reflection to process new knowledge and practice new skills over the course of a school day; and
- Teachers have extended time for gauging student learning and planning.

Some other extended learning opportunities often include, but are not limited to:

- Before- and after-school programs;
- Extended year and summer programs;
- Full day kindergarten and a pre-kindergarten program;
- Longer school day beyond the traditional hours;
- Saturday make-up classes for students with absences or course failure;
- School year calendars that reflect more than the minimum state required 180 days;
- Eliminated study halls and replacement with academic courses;
- Learning labs and other academic supports (not in place of, but in addition to, classroom learning);
- Learning enrichment programs for more challenging academics; and
- Student leadership opportunities and essential skills training.

Some points for discussion between parents and educators - A structure for extended learning opportunities in school:

- Might be considered as a reform strategy to improve learning outcomes;
- Provides consistency in learning and performance expectations;
- Supports students who have fallen behind and those who can benefit from accelerating their learning progress;
- Backed by research as a way to help close the achievement gap;
- Could be considered as a strategy to support students who have failed courses;
- May be necessary to facilitate students' IEP goals;
- Serves to support student preparation for assessments without using class time;
- May need parent and community support for administrative challenges such as budgeting, scheduling, transportation, and contractual agreements for staff and services.

Traditional in-school learning times have expanded beyond the school walls and the classroom clock. With technology and a clearer understanding of high quality after school programs, standards based learning can occur anytime and anywhere. Educators have begun to re-think the physical learning environments and interactions that students need to learn to become prepared for college and career after graduation. Parents can choose and decide when and if that occurs through expanded learning opportunities.

Extended and expanded student learning opportunities refer to activities, experiences, education programs, and strategies intended to increase the amount of time, methods, and occasions that students are interacting with ideas and materials that compliment classroom learning. Improved, reinforced, and enriched student learning opportunities outside of school can be an effective way for parents and educators to build PASS partnerships and compliment what students learn during the school day and school year.

Expanded learning opportunities enlarge the boundaries of classroom learning. A high quality program will layer standards based learning from the classroom with real world applications. Parents can best support their child's learning by considering programs and opportunities that use the out of school experience to strengthen the in school expectations and performance.

Expanded leaning generally occurs in non-traditional learning environments outside of the school, school hours, or the school calendar. At times, the opportunities are delivered by students' classroom, school or district teachers. However, expanded learning opportunities are often facilitated by other certified teachers, tutors, mentors, knowledgeable community members, college students, and older high performing students. Different instructors can bring new perspectives and provide more learning time practicing student's individual strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes called out-of-school-learning-time, expanded learning opportunities can be a balanced blend of standards based instruction and creative options to practice skills in a safe learning location. Expanded learning opportunities provide both learning support and a range of advantages and enrichment in various subjects.

Learning beyond the traditional classroom provides many students with the support and enrichment opportunities that ensure a wider perspective on the knowledge and skills learned at school. Through PASS partnerships parents and educators can build strategies developed for the purpose of improving academic achievement, enriching learning experiences, intensifying learning challenges, reducing learning loss, close both learning and achievement gaps, and other benefits for students. Expanded learning opportunities introduce a broader vision for student learning that matches contemporary instruction and goes beyond traditional education.

Choices and decisions about expanded learning opportunities provide parents with a vital role in their child's learning. Before enrolling students in any program parents should ask about and observe the quality standards, discuss their child's learning goals, and share observations with their child and their child's teacher. Together as a PASS team, they can build strategies to maximize student benefits.

An example of extended learning opportunities

Test preparation is a common expanded learning opportunity that some parents choose for their child for many reasons. Some of those reasons are: enrichment for high performing students; support for struggling students; the student experiences test anxiety that affects academic performance; parents want to provide their child with higher quality learning experiences than those in a low performing school; curiosity about their child's ability to excel at new academic standards and assessments; the student's ability to achieve a higher score on college entrance examinations; teacher recommendations; and other individualized reasons.

The four most common types of expanded learning opportunities for test preparation:

- Academic tutoring;
- Pre-college course work;
- Mentoring; and
- Recreation and childcare follow closely and can be true opportunities to develop essential learning skills.

Expanded and extended learning opportunities create opportunities for all students to further develop knowledge, practice skills, strengthen academic performance, and realize their full potential.

Some benefits of expanded learning such as test preparation:

- Offer varied and additional materials;
- Extend time spent on supporting and mediating student's individual weaknesses;
- Provide strategies to capitalize on student's strengths and apply those strategies to other areas;
- Build student's confidence;
- Reduce student's anxiety about test taking;
- Strengthen subsequent classroom, college and career preparation;
- Exposure to college environments where preparation courses are offered; and
- Investment and commitment from the student's community.

Some other expanded learning opportunities often include but are not limited to:

- Enrichment programs that compliment classroom expectations such as tutoring and advanced courses;
- Digital learning – sometimes called blended learning – provides instructional interactions where students can watch recorded lectures, communicate with teachers electronically, or use interactive programs that support students as they work through a problem, task, or assignment;
- Independent online learning;
- Voluntary opportunities to prepare for tests such as SAT, ACT, PARCC, college entrance exams, technical licensing exams, etc.;
- Additional high level courses to accelerate the student's year of graduation;
- Dual enrollment in both high school and college courses;
- Co-curricular programs that occur outside of school hours such as musical, theatrical, academic competitions, performances, math teams, mock trials, debate competitions, robotic clubs, etc.;
- Work-based learning projects, internships, apprenticeships, service learning, civic engagement, volunteer services;
- Additional credit requirements for graduation (often in a particular subject area, considered a "concentration" in the subject matter); and
- Before-school and after-schools programs that are either school-run or school-affiliated learning opportunities for the purpose of supporting or supplementing student's classroom learning.

Some points for discussion between parents and educators - A structure for expanded learning opportunities outside of school:

- Usually takes place before or immediately after the school day, during winter sessions, school breaks, summer programs;

- Financial support vs. parent cost;
- Programs may be operated by districts, schools, community organizations, chartable initiatives, or private for-profit companies;
- Relationships with third party vendors;
- Space utilization for third party programs;
- Bussing for programs at the end of school;
- Teacher motivation to partner with parents about student learning outside of school;
- May employ teachers or other individuals who serve in some sort of educator capacity; and
- May resemble child-care rather than academic programs.

In order for extended and/or expanded learning opportunities to support student learning and performance in the classroom, educators and parents must work as equal partners to explore real benefits and set student learning goals.

PASS partnerships allow parents and educators to:

- Develop a wrap-around strategy path to share and discuss expectations for learning and progress measurement in the classroom;
- Develop a shared responsibility, mutual understanding, and acceptance of the student’s learning needs;
- Recognize and accommodate the student’s learning style when setting individualized learning goals;
- Educators and parents share key data and results regarding the students learning progress and outcomes;
- Consider the student’s interests, curiosity, and motivation level to learn new things;
- Help high performing students become more inclusive;
- Ensure that out-of-school learning goals and activities align with the student’s larger learning goals;
- Monitor and acknowledge some non-traditional learning methods and materials as having value;
- Explore programs and locations where children learn (e.g., tutors, books, and other learning materials); and
- Enable the student to develop real life skills and strengthen essential skills for learning such as organization, planning, etc.

Extended and expanded learning opportunities must be meaningfully, purposefully, and effectively utilized. When that occurs participating students are more likely to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the skills and knowledge taught to them in school.
- Link classroom learning to college and career requirements.
- Benefit from practicing critical-thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills that will prepare them for a 21st century career.
- Acquire greater communication and collaborative skills.
- Develop workplace readiness skills that prepare them for competitive enrollment in advanced training schools, postsecondary institutions, and employment in a highly competitive work force.
- Receive opportunities to earn industry certifications.
- Obtain meaningful hands-on experiences in their career pathway.
- Benefit from real-life opportunities such as internships, mentorships, clinical, and cooperative experiences, that provide an advantage when entering postsecondary education and/or the workplace.
- Explore their interests and personalize their education.
- Become motivated to learn more about topic of interest.
- Graduate on time or early.
- Seek enrollment in a career-training program and/or postsecondary education.

Expanding student learning provides a range of enrichment and supportive learning activities that help students practice and strengthen their knowledge and skills to be successful in school and beyond graduation.