

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Learning Time and Educational Opportunity in California High Schools

Executive Summary

November 2014

California high school teachers are constantly racing against the clock. They are expected to provide a strong college preparatory curriculum, promote critical and creative thinking, and meet students' social and emotional needs. Learning time is an essential resource for addressing all of these goals. But, it seems to be in short supply in many California high schools.

This report draws on a statewide teacher survey to examine how learning time is distributed across California high schools. The survey, conducted by UCLA IDEA during the 2013-2014 school year, included a representative sample of nearly 800 teachers. These teachers work at a demographically diverse set of schools and hail from every region of the state.

Throughout the report, we compare learning time across three groups of high schools:

- 1) *Low Poverty Schools* (0-25% of students receive Free or Reduced Price Lunch);
- 2) *Low and Mixed Poverty Schools* (0-50% of students receive Free or Reduced Price Lunch);
- 3) *High Poverty Schools* (75-100% of students receive Free or Reduced Price Lunch).

Core findings include:

- Teachers in *High Poverty Schools* are more likely than their peers to report that learning time is undermined by problems with school facilities, lack of access to school libraries and technology, and insufficient qualified substitute teachers.
- High school teachers reported that 3-4 times more students in *High Poverty Schools* than in *Low Poverty Schools* experience a variety of economic and social stressors that impact learning time, such as unstable housing, hunger, and lack of access to medical or dental care. On any given day, there is a 39% chance that these stressors affect learning time in a *High Poverty School* classroom compared to a 13% chance in a *Low Poverty School* classroom.
- *High Poverty Schools* experience greater time loss than other schools in the state during class periods due to interruptions, delays, or routines. Much of this time loss results from institutional challenges such as incorporating new students after the school year starts or receiving phone calls from the main office. Instructional time lost in these ways adds up. Over the course of an average day, students in *High Poverty Schools* lose roughly 30 minutes more than their counterparts in *Low Poverty Schools* due to these factors during class periods.
- In addition to losing more time during class periods, *High Poverty Schools* experience a number of other disruptions that cut into scheduled instructional time across the school calendar. *High Poverty Schools* face more disrupted or lost days than other schools due

to teacher absences, emergency lockdowns, and preparation for standardized tests. Over the course of the year, *High Poverty Schools* lose almost ten days more than *Low Poverty Schools* (22.3 days to 12.6 days).

- Teachers in *High Poverty Schools* spend more time than their peers attending to a variety of non-instructional duties, from supervising students during lunch to taking care of janitorial and clerical tasks to covering classes for absent colleagues. Over the course of an average week, teachers in *High Poverty Schools* spend an hour more than their counterparts in *Low Poverty Schools* on these non-teaching responsibilities.
- Teachers in *High Poverty Schools* spend as much time as their peers planning lessons, offering written feedback to student work, and providing academic support.
- Teachers in *High Poverty Schools* report addressing a variety of important academic, social, and long-term planning issues with their students more frequently than teachers in *Low Poverty Schools* or *Low and Mixed Poverty Schools*. Teachers in *High Poverty Schools* spend substantially more time than their peers discussing community problems and various forms of societal inequality, providing social or emotional counseling, and offering college and career guidance.

This study highlights the need for renewed attention to questions about equal access to learning time. California holds students to a common set of assessment standards and requirements for university admission. Yet students have access to markedly different amounts of instructional time depending on the neighborhoods in which they live. It is true that schools can use available learning time in more or less effective ways. But the amount of available learning time creates a ceiling, limiting the capacity of the school to promote student achievement and development.

No one could or would defend a system of public education that required students attending *High Poverty Schools* to finish their school year two weeks before their peers in *Low Poverty Schools*. Nor would anyone defend sending students from *High Poverty Schools* home a half hour early each day. California now supports an educational system that produces these effects. Through new and targeted investment, this inequality can be transformed. It's about time.

To view the full document, visit: <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/>

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