

Clarence Edwards Middle School:

Success Through Transformation

Just a few years ago, Boston's Clarence Edwards Middle School was on the verge of being shut down. But by 2009, a renaissance at the Edwards made it one of the highest performing and most desired middle schools in Boston, dramatically narrowing and even eliminating academic achievement gaps while delivering a far more well-rounded education to its high-poverty student population. This is the story of how they did it.



The Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative

In 2005, the National Center on Time & Learning and Massachusetts 2020 partnered with the state Legislature, the governor, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and called on school districts from around the state to rethink the traditional 6-hour, 180-day school schedule. Schools were challenged to dream big—to redesign their school day to enable young people to master the skills necessary to thrive in a complicated and competitive world.

In response, teachers, union leaders, community organizations, administrators and parents came together in schools across the state to develop a new way of thinking about education. They reviewed data and strategized ways to close the achievement gap. They added time for, and provided individualized support in, core academic subjects; increased enrichment opportunities that had been stripped from the school day; and brainstormed about how teachers might collaborate more and find time to learn from one another.

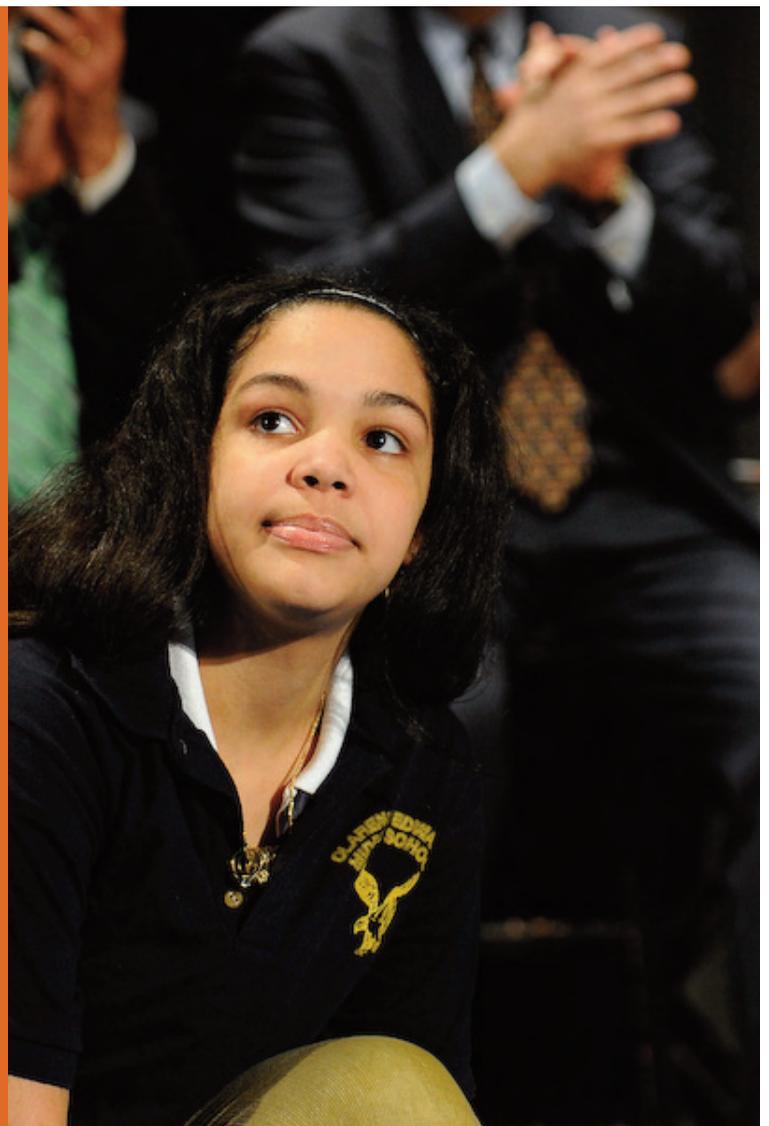
The result: a school day that no longer revolves around the schedules of farms and factories but instead around the needs of today's youth and their families and the demands of today's world.

From this vision came a new reality. In the fall of 2006, 10 schools in 5 districts became the pioneers for the first statewide initiative to expand learning time in the United States. The Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Initiative is a competitive grant program that allows participating schools to redesign and expand their school day for all students to advance academic outcomes, broaden enrichment opportunities, and improve instruction. Those schools determined to have the highest quality proposals are awarded \$1,300 per pupil per year to support the implementation of their rebuilt school day and year. Today, over 12,000 students in 22 schools in 11 districts across the state attend ELT schools.

President Barack Obama

“We can no longer afford an academic calendar designed when America was a nation of farmers who needed their children at home plowing the land at the end of each day. That calendar may have once made sense, but today, it puts us at a competitive disadvantage.”

(March 2009)





Just a few years ago, Boston's Clarence Edwards Middle School was on the verge of being shut down. The long-struggling school had among the lowest math scores of any middle school in the city. The school's enrollment was dwindling as even neighboring families chose to send their children elsewhere. Faculty and student morale was low, and family engagement was almost non-existent. Like other middle schools in Boston, students left the building at 1:30 p.m. every day.

But by 2009, the Edwards had risen to become one of the highest performing middle schools in Boston, dramatically narrowing and even eliminating achievement gaps for its disadvantaged students. Test scores have soared, with impressive growth across the board in English language arts (ELA), math and science and across all subgroups of students. A school once struggling to fill its classrooms now has a waiting list. The school's enrichment offerings rival those at elite private schools, including a band, a football team, and student apprenticeships with Google and MIT. The school's annual theater production attracts hundreds of families and community members, including fifth graders from nearby feeder elementary schools, many of whom leave hoping to gain a slot in next year's class.

How did the Edwards, over the course of just a few years, dramatically boost student achievement and transform the school's culture into one of excellence and engagement? The school is in the same building with many of the same teachers, and the demographics of the student body have not meaningfully changed: 89% low-income; 88% minority; 32% special education; and 24% limited English proficiency.

In the fall of 2006, Edwards became one of the pioneering Massachusetts public schools taking part in the Expanded Learning Time Initiative. Though the Edwards had previously taken some essential reform actions, the inflection point in the Edwards' dramatic turnaround can be tied directly to the moment it re-opened its doors with a brand new school day rebuilt from the ground up to include 300 more hours of learning and personalized instruction per year. The students and teachers have not looked back.

Expanded Learning Time (ELT) at Edwards Middle School

Like all ELT schools in Massachusetts, the Edwards has redesigned the school day to incorporate 300 additional hours of learning per year for all students for three primary purposes:

- 1. More time has allowed for a differentiated, data-driven approach to instruction that has resulted in dramatic academic gains for Edwards students.** The Edwards has increased instructional time for all core subjects. Every student now has a social studies and science block each day in addition to four extra hours per week for academic support through a strategy the school calls “Academic Leagues.” Using formative and summative assessment data, students are placed in leagues based on their most pressing academic needs, predominantly in ELA or math. Academic Leagues feature smaller class sizes and are led by Edwards teachers who receive coaching and curricular support from the school’s Instructional Leadership Team. Teachers closely monitor students’ progress through frequent assessments and provide individualized attention to students in areas where they need the most help. As students show academic progress, their Academic League placement is adjusted accordingly.
- 2. More time for teachers to collaborate has ensured that all instructional time, in core subjects, academic support, and enrichment, is used effectively.** Edwards teachers now meet in grade-level teams two to three times per week to discuss student support issues while students are in specialty classes like music, art, and PE. In addition, Edwards students are dismissed at 11:45 am every Friday enabling the full faculty and representatives from key partnering organizations to work on professional development until 2:15 pm. The Friday professional development sessions are planned by the school’s Instructional Leadership Team, with a primary focus on analyzing student data. Once a month, the Friday session is devoted to teaching demonstrations during which time Edwards teachers model lessons for their colleagues.
- 3. More time has translated into robust enrichment programs and community partnerships, resulting in positive changes in student engagement, school culture, and family engagement.** All Edwards students participate in enrichment programming designed to build transferable skills and nurture talents beyond reading, writing and arithmetic. Seventh and eighth graders choose four electives per year from a menu of options including swimming, Latin dance, environmental science, and fashion design. Electives are taught by Edwards teachers and specialists from partnering community-based organizations. All sixth graders participate in Citizen Schools, a national program that focuses on developing 21st century skills like leadership and oral communication through hands-on apprenticeships with professionals. At the culmination of each semester, Edwards students perform, demonstrate, and exhibit what they have learned in their enrichment classes in front of the school community.

Sample Edwards Student Schedule: **With ELT**

7:20-7:30	Homeroom
Block 1 7:35-8:40	Core Academics: ELA
Block 2 8:42-9:44	Core Academics: Math
9:47-10:02	Snack
Block 3 10:05-11:07	Unified Arts: (PE, Music, Art)
Block 4 11:10-12:12	Core Academics: Social Studies
12:15-12:40	Lunch
Block 5 12:40-1:42	Core Academics: Science
Block 6 1:45-2:45	Academic Leagues
Block 7 2:45-4:15	Rotating Elective

Sample Edwards Student Schedule: **Before ELT**

7:20-7:30	Homeroom
Block 1 7:35-8:55	Core Academics: ELA
Block 2 9:00-10:20	Core Academics: Math
Block 3 10:25-11:45	Unified Arts: (PE, Music, Art)
11:45-12:05	Lunch
Block 4 12:05-1:30	Core Academics: Science or Social Studies

Core Academics
Academic Support
Enrichment

Jeff Riley

Former Edwards principal, current academic superintendent for Boston Middle and K-8 Schools

“As a school that had been labeled failing and in need of turnaround, we recognized that things had to change. The adoption of extra time was the key first step in bringing about change. Without it, we would have been unable to move our school so quickly from a place of underperformance to one of high achievement.”

Results

The results at the Edwards are remarkable, and the school has been heralded nationally for its dramatic turnaround. Since first implementing ELT in 2006-07, the Edwards has made considerable progress in ELA, math, and science for all students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). In just three years:

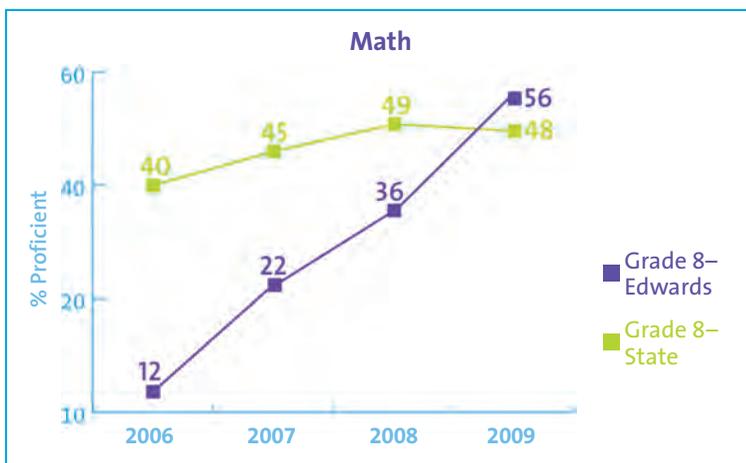
- The Edwards reduced the achievement gap with the state by 80 percent in ELA, by two-thirds in science, and **8th graders now exceed the state proficiency rate by eight points in math.**
- The 8th grade ELA failure rate plummeted by 75 percent, while the number of students advancing to the state’s highest level of achievement in math increased tenfold.
- Low-income, special education, limited English proficiency, African American, and Latino students made extraordinary gains at the Edwards. Each subgroup now exceeds the state proficiency rate for that subgroup in math, and four of the five subgroups outperform the state averages in ELA.

As a result of the Edwards’ success, all other middle schools in Boston have petitioned to become Expanded Learning Time schools and the Edwards’ principal has been promoted to academic superintendent for Boston’s Middle and K-8 Schools, charged with oversight of 29 schools in the city.

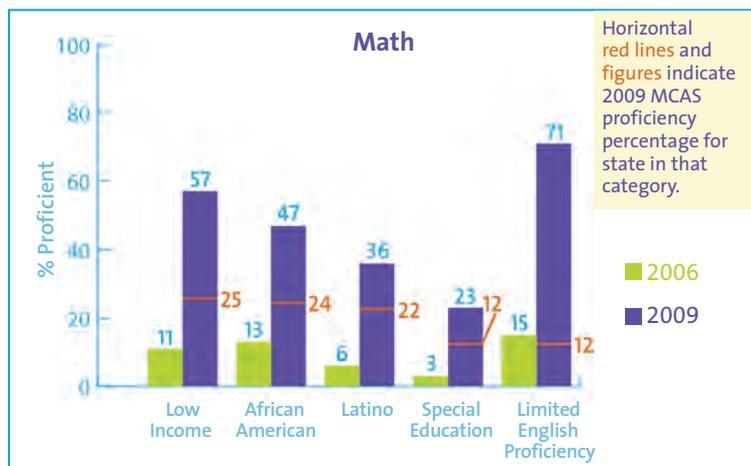
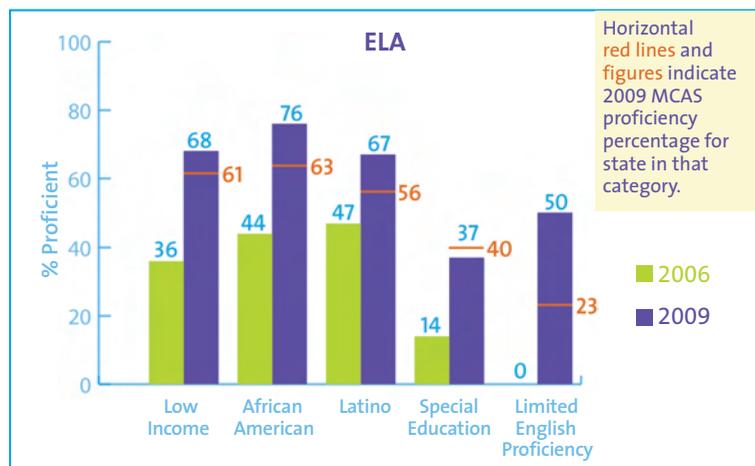
Like all ELT schools, the Edwards gauges its success through measures beyond standardized test scores. Other indicators of the school’s rapid progress include:

- ✓ **Increased student enrollment:** In 2006, 17 rising 6th graders chose Edwards Middle School as their first choice. In 2009, 250 rising 6th graders chose the Edwards as their first choice, boosting enrollment to over 500 students and resulting in the creation of a waiting list.
- ✓ **Greater teacher empowerment:** When asked, teachers at the Edwards respond much more favorably than their peers across the state that they are involved in the school’s decisions about instruction and are trusted as professionals.
- ✓ **Competitive high school acceptance rates:** Fourteen Edwards graduates currently study at the prestigious, audition-based Boston Arts Academy—a fellow ELT school and the city’s only public high school for visual and performing arts—and twenty graduates have been accepted and currently attend Boston’s competitive exam schools, the Boston Latin Academy and John D. O’Bryant School of Math & Science.
- ✓ **Stronger partnerships:** Lead partner Citizen Schools, which previously served 35 Edwards students per year through their optional after-school program, now serves the entire sixth grade class annually. In recognition of their now robust arts program, the school was selected to participate in the Fidelity FutureStage Program, resulting in a donation of \$25,000 worth of instruments from Fidelity Investments and the Boston Pops. The Edwards has also benefited from partnerships with the Boston Ballet, the Bird Street Community Center, Medicine Wheel, and the Urban Ecology Institute at Boston College.

8th Grade Students Have Closed and Narrowed the Achievement Gap with the State



8th Grade Proficiency at the Edwards, 2006–2009



Other Essential Components for Successful School Transformation

While ELT has been a primary driver of change and results at the Edwards, there are other essential components of the school's turnaround:

Strong leadership. The Boston Public Schools hired motivated leaders who had a sense of urgency to drive change in the building. A team consisting of the principal, assistant principal, director of instruction, director of Expanded Learning Time, key teacher-leaders, and the Citizen Schools campus director meets regularly to oversee instructional leadership and implementation of the new school day.

Building teacher effectiveness. Strengthening teaching was a priority before the implementation of ELT. The Edwards has built a highly effective teaching force through the use of evaluations, an increased investment in professional development and collaborative planning time, and the active recruitment of outstanding new educators.

A school-wide focus on data-driven instruction. Data informs every instructional decision that is made at the Edwards, and teachers and administrators have been trained extensively in its usage. Formative assessments are used four to five times a school year, and data boards prominently display each student's progress toward proficiency in math and ELA.

A culture of professional collaboration. The administration established collaborative planning time for grade- and subject-level teams of teachers prior to the implementation of an expanded school day. The professional development schedule now includes full-faculty meetings every Friday afternoon that incorporate key community partners.



Senator Edward Kennedy

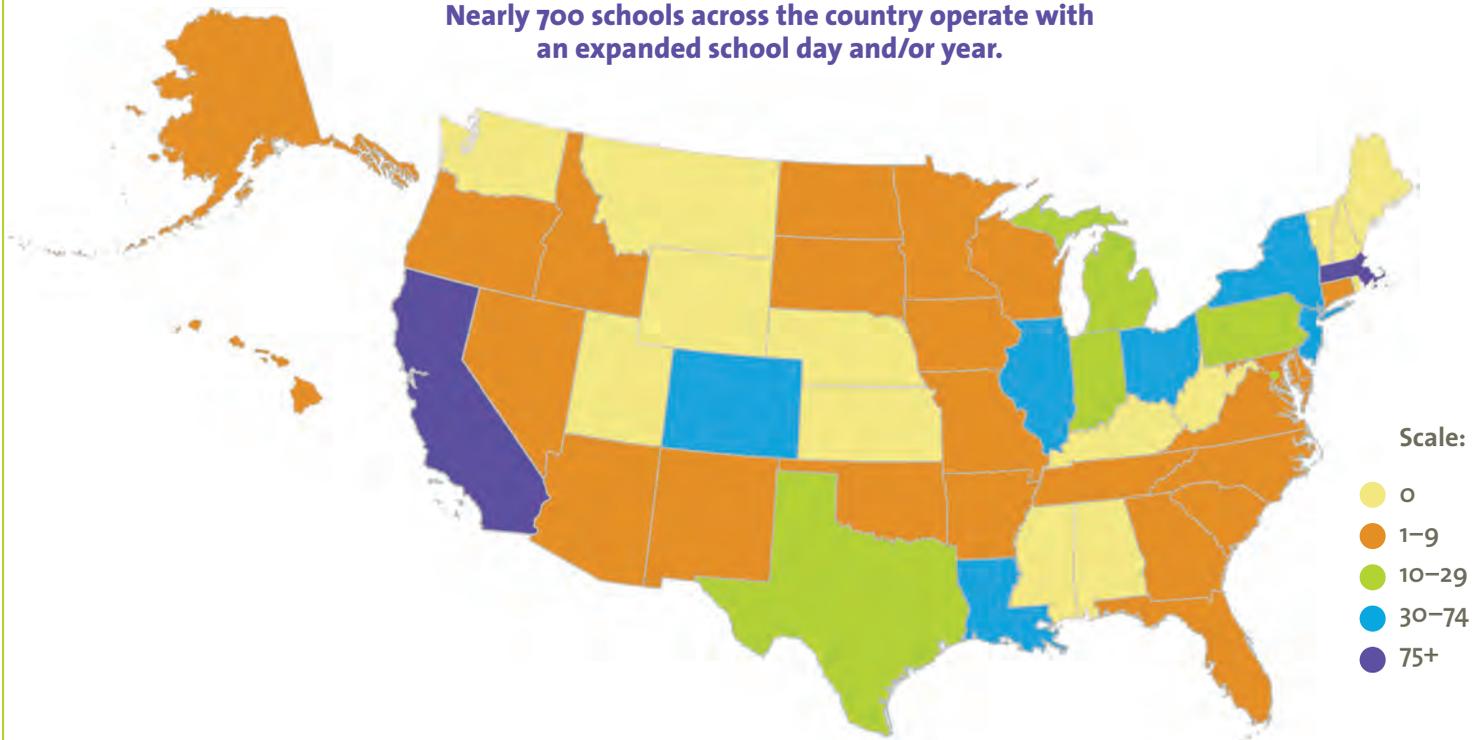
“There are few more promising strategies for helping all children get ahead in today's global economy than expanding learning time. . . The early results of the Expanded Learning Time Initiative here in Massachusetts are impressive and show real promise in preparing all children for a lifetime of success. I believe what we're doing with expanded learning here in Massachusetts is a model for the nation.”

(Visit to the Edwards with Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, January 2008)

Growing Momentum for More Time

Education experts have long recognized that expanding learning time beyond the traditional 180 six-hour days should be part of improving public education, but until recently there has been little movement on this important issue. This is changing. The current administration has advocated for a redesign of the school calendar to better meet the needs of today's students; under the guidelines for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), unprecedented federal funds are slated to be channeled to education and incentivize a longer school day and year as a strategy for improving schools; and a growing number of U.S. schools have already broken from the traditional school calendar and shifted to expanded learning time to improve educational outcomes. The success of these schools in advancing achievement for all students is contagious and promises to be an integral part of transforming public education across America.

Nearly 700 schools across the country operate with an expanded school day and/or year.



“When the Edwards Middle School switched to a longer day, I thought, ‘great, I can barely stand six and a half hours. Who wants to go for nine?’ But during the first year I realized that ELT makes school more fun. We are able to choose our electives, and when you choose what you want to do, it makes the day go by faster.

If I went home at two o’clock, I’d probably be doing nothing. I’d probably sit on the couch with a Mountain Dew watching TV or I’d be out skateboarding. But I’d give up skateboarding and Mountain Dew any day of the week to be here at Edwards. Nothing that you would do out on the streets at two o’clock can compare to what people are doing here at 4:30.”

Leo, former 8th grade student at the Edwards

Massachusetts 2020 and the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) are affiliated nonprofit organizations based in Boston, dedicated to expanding learning time to eliminate the achievement gap and provide a well-rounded education for all children. Massachusetts 2020 focuses its efforts in Massachusetts and is currently leading the country's most ambitious initiative to rethink what a public school means by adding significantly more learning time to the school day and year. NCTL is the leading national organization focused on time and learning and how schools can achieve more by using expanded learning time well. NCTL conducts research and advances public policy at the federal, state, and local levels and provides direct technical assistance to a growing number of states, districts, and schools that seek to expand learning time to fuel growth and success.



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