

GODSMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP AN EXPANDED LEARNING TIME MODEL



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INTRODUCTION

Students at Godsman Elementary School in southwest Denver face a number of challenges each day. More than half are English language learners, and a majority of the student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch. Costly activities like sports or classes outside of school are luxuries, making them unavailable to many families in the Godsman community. “I am not able to provide my children with karate classes and cooking classes,” says parent Bianca Tellechea. “It’s not possible time-wise or economically.”

The families and staff at Godsman knew this opportunity gap kept their students from accessing a range of experiences that add to their learning and life. So when the school was invited to rethink time to expand the school day and provide those opportunities during school, the staff leaped at the chance.



SNAPSHOT OF GODSMAN: AN EXPANDED LEARNING SCHOOL (2014-2015)



603
Total students



89.7%
Students receiving
free and reduced lunch



53.1%
English language
learners



100%
Enrichment classes
taught by community
partners

VISION AND GOALS

From the beginning, the Godsman community recognized that introducing expanded learning opportunities (ELOs), and the reforms that come with them, must do more than simply keep students in the classroom for more time each day. “ELOs are bigger than just adding time to your day. It is using your resources differently,” says teacher Evan Wettengal. “[It’s about] looking at time, money, and staffing and figuring out how to work all those things in ways that are good for kids, parents, teachers, administration, test scores, and the health of the children. Adding time on to your day is just the beginning of what you can do.”



Ms. Colorado takes a selfie with students after addressing the importance of standing up against bullying.

To help guide the work, Godsman emphasized a shift to student learning objectives, in which educators set course-long goals for each student and then establish ways to monitor the acquisition of critical skills necessary for success in college, career, and life as students achieve these goals. The student learning objectives allowed Godsman to craft an expanded learning time model that radically shifted how the school approaches the day and helps learners meet these goals.



Highlighting individuality and the importance of being yourself, students collaborate to paint themselves on fence posts. The fence posts are hung on the fence around the school.

UNDERSTANDING THE TIME COLLABORATIVE

One of the most valuable resources in education is time and how it is used. Next generation learning environments intentionally use time to personalize learning, provide deeper interventions, and create learning opportunities beyond the classroom.

The TIME Collaborative is a partnership of the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL), the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), and The Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) to help three Colorado districts and 12 schools, including Godsman, rethink the role time plays in their learning environments.

These teams worked closely with NCTL, CEI, and CDE to design a school day and year that is personalized to the unique needs of their students and community. The redesign process involved technical assistance and targeted coaching with each school team. Plans focused on integrating NCTL’s Seven Essential Elements for more and better learning time with school and district priorities.

“Adding time on to your day is just the beginning of what you can do.”

– Evan Wettengal, Teacher

IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

At Godsman, core academic instruction is organized into two areas of focus—mathematics and literacy, each broken down into smaller lessons. Within the literacy block, students now have an hour for reading, an hour for writing, 45 minutes for differentiated interventions, and 45 minutes for English language skills development. The expanded school day gives teachers more time to spend with students to dive deeper into core subject instruction.

“We now have the space to target the needs of students and do small-group instruction,” says Principal Priscilla Hopkins.

These deep interventions have had a remarkable impact on student growth, says teacher Bonnie Wong Estrada. “I think that is the biggest way to meet our kids’ needs academically; to give them intervention on top of the core.”

In addition to expanding time for core subject instruction, Godsman provides students with a range of enrichment classes led by community partners through the Beacon program.

“Every student at Godsman has the opportunity to choose and take an enrichment class,” Hopkins says. “Their academic performance does not weigh in [to this opportunity].” Often students who are struggling academically benefit the most from an enrichment class aligned with their interests or hobbies. Enrichment classes ask students to use their mind and bodies to develop skills sometimes overlooked during the traditional academic school day. For example, in yoga, music, fashion, acting and theater, cooking, or soccer classes, students cultivate skills in interpersonal communication, teamwork, and perseverance, as well as develop a strong work ethic, helping them to become more thoughtful learners and citizens.

PARENTS EMBRACE EXPANDED LEARNING TIME

For many parents at Godsman, the shift to ELOs has positively impacted the academic experiences of their children as well as the lives of their family. “My kids are excited to come home to talk to me about [their enrichment classes] and introduce me to things I haven’t done before,” says parent Brianna Camacho. For example, Camacho’s oldest son came home from school after his first day of yoga enrichment, one of the last activities she thought he would have chosen. From that day on, he has been inspired to use the health-related knowledge learned to help his mom and siblings get healthier.

For many families, the experiences students gain during Beacon enrichment classes have helped bring the family closer. “It benefits us as a family because our kids bring that [interest] home to us,” says Tellechea. “It becomes something that they love and it becomes something that as a family we can explore together.”



Image
Students cool off at Bear Creek splash pad during the Boys & Girls Club Summer Academy.

And the freedom of enrichment classes helps build students' self-confidence. "It gives you time to be yourself," says student America Vasquez. "[There are lots of options, and] you can choose which ones you want."

Student experience isn't the only thing that has shifted with expanded learning time—adults have seen a transformation as well. Throughout the expanded learning time initiative, Godsman has worked to rethink the way teachers approach planning, collaboration, and evaluation. "We redid the schedule to ensure as many grade levels as possible had 90 minutes of uninterrupted planning

every day with their team," Hopkins says. While Godsman teachers are required to meet as a team twice each week, many teachers choose to spend other planning sessions engaged with their team as well.

Increasing the opportunities for collaboration has helped individual teachers improve preparation and planning. It has also inspired broader changes in the culture and approach of the staff as a whole. The additional planning time helps to ensure all of the teachers are on the same page, says teacher Gelmarie Ortiz Nieves, and that we're aligned in what we're teaching across the school.



Students participate in yoga at the park with Arabesque Yoga.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS



STAFF SUPPORT

One of the first major hurdles Godsman faced when staff discussed implementing expanded learning time was a lack of teacher buy-in. Initially, many teachers were concerned about a later dismissal time, citing challenges such as increased traffic or complications in picking up their own children at different schools. Before the transformation at Godsman, though, many teachers spent an hour or two after student dismissal catching up on planning and preparation. While the reforms keep students in school longer, additional opportunities for planning have helped teachers be more productive, eliminating the need to stay late or work at home. “I don’t leave any later than I used to,” Wettengel says. “The individual [planning period] is mostly uninterrupted.”



RESOURCES

For many schools trying to implement ELOs, funding represents a huge hurdle, and Godsman was no exception. While the school currently receives support from its district and through its participation in the TIME Collaborative, the funds will not last forever, which means the school needs to be self-sufficient for the long run. Hopkins is confident it will happen, and community partnerships will be key. (Godsman’s current collaboration with the Boys & Girls Club of Denver is a great example of the potential for sustainable partners.) The school continues to work on expanding its number of quality community partners, which, coupled with grant opportunities, will ensure the enrichment programming has a stable funding stream going forward.

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

An enormous part of what makes expanded learning time transformative at Godsman is its partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver. The community organization provides enrichments throughout the school day during its Beacon program, which includes yoga, karate, book club, and soccer, and is available to all first- through fifth-graders. The organization also offers comprehensive wraparound services for families at the school, such as clothing for parents and students, food for families in emergencies, crisis help, and after-school programming. The partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Metro Denver has been vital, Hopkins says. Without it, classes like NBA Math Hoops—a math-intensive, basketball-themed class that allows students to earn NBA Nuggets tickets, player visits, and other gear—wouldn’t be available.

If you’re interested in bringing a community partner into your school community, check out [Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning: A Toolkit](#), a guidebook that provides useful tools, resources, and advice from schools like Godsman.

The Karate enrichment class had their graduation at the Mountain Academy of Martial Arts studio. Students had to perform certain rituals and fundamentals to receive their belts and gowns.



A PROMISING FUTURE

Expanded learning has shifted the culture and opportunities at Godsman, and some early indicators are showing an increase in overall success for students. Attendance is one of the first indicators to climb, and it's a big one: "In order for kids to be successful in school, they need to be at school," Estrada says.

Before the enrichments were put in place, the absentee rate was very high. But in the past three years, attendance has continued to climb. One hypothesis is the excitement and engagement around the enrichments; kids don't want to miss out. "They love the enrichments," Wettengal says. "ELOs have definitely been one factor in our attendance rising."

Excitement around enrichments hasn't just impacted kids coming to school, it has spread to all elements of the learning day, especially core subjects. Educators see higher levels of engagement, motivation, focus, and interest across the board. Student demeanor has shifted, too. "The kids really want to learn and enjoy being in the classroom," says teacher Nieves.

"The opportunity for self-expression and investigation during enrichments has made a big impact," Wettengal says. "We're having higher quality learning experiences in our core subjects."

This motivation in the classroom is paying dividends for test scores. "We are on a steady growth pattern, which is very exciting," Hopkins says. "Our interim data shows good, general overall growth in student scores." This academic achievement is reinforced by a sharp decline in the number of students requiring intensive classroom intervention. In 2014, five third-graders needed intense intervention, down from 25 to 30 students four years ago.

"I am very excited about the future and ELOs," Hopkins says. Over the next few years, the school hopes to provide additional, differentiated enrichment opportunities for students, ensuring that all students and families have a program that fits their needs. The staff is also excited about scaling the enrichment program, creating new alternatives in early childhood education and building on the success of the Beacon program in an after-school format.

With an emphasis on sustainability and serving the unique needs of every student, Godsman is closing the opportunity gap for students in southwest Denver.



Image

One rotation during a Beacon Day consisted of the game "Cheeto Head." Students wore a shower cap with shaving cream on their heads and had to catch Cheetos thrown by their classmates.

THANK YOU

TO ALL THE GODSMAN STAFF, FAMILIES, COMMUNITY MEMBERS,
AND STUDENTS WHO SHARED THEIR STORIES WITH US.

YOU'RE AN INSPIRATION FOR WHAT
THE FUTURE OF LEARNING CAN HOLD.



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