


EXPANDING LEARNING IN BILINGUAL IMMERSION AT ESCUELA BILINGÜE PIONEER AN EXPANDED LEARNING TIME MODEL



THE
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Pioneer's beautiful garden was made possible by Bryce Winton Brown and the Growe Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

Escuela Bilingüe Pioneer, an elementary school in the Boulder Valley School District, is a dual-language immersion school. Approximately 50 percent of Pioneer's students come from families where the primary language is Spanish, says Principal Kristin Nelson-Steinhoff. And although Pioneer had established itself as one of the leading models for bilingual education in Colorado, the staff and community saw the need for change. "About half of our kids were doing really great and about half weren't," Nelson-Steinhoff says. "We had become somewhat stagnant when it came to growing and learning."

As the staff began examining the root cause of this circumstance, Nelson-Steinhoff kept hearing a recurring theme: not enough time in the school day. All staff agreed that there wasn't enough time during the day to work with students, and too much time was wasted during nonlearning moments. To better enable student learning and for help in redesigning its school day, Pioneer joined the TIME Collaborative.



SNAPSHOT OF PIONEER: AN EXPANDED LEARNING SCHOOL (2014)¹



473

Total students



42%

Students receiving
free lunch



42%

English language
learners

1. Student Demographics, Escuela Bilingüe Pioneer, Boulder Valley School District, 2014. Available at <http://www.bvsd.org/elementary/pioneer/Pages/demographics.aspx>.

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 Pioneer, 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.

WHY EXPAND LEARNING

When Nelson-Steinhoff and the Pioneer team first joined the TIME Collaborative, they wanted to really understand how they were spending their time. A time audit conducted at the school in 2012-2013 demonstrated how fragmented the school day had become. Students were frequently in transitions — moving from one learning space or moment to another — wasting precious learning time. And learners who needed the most support were often pulled out of core instruction for intervention despite research showing that without core instruction time, interventions are far less successful. After securing a 45-minute school day extension from the district, Pioneer began developing a model that improved the cohesion of students' school day and created more learning opportunities.

At the same time Pioneer was expanding its school day, staff was also implementing a new instructional method — a bilingual immersion program that uses a more integrative, multidisciplinary approach to bilingual literacy through units of study. The staff spent a full year researching and designing new instructional plans, using *Teaching for Biliteracy* by Karen Beeman and Cheryl Urow as a guide.

PROGRESSION OF BILINGUAL LEARNING AT PIONEER



THE MODEL

Redesigning the school day at Pioneer has created space for personalized, student-centered learning experiences that engage students and make the best use of time. Key components of the school's new learning model were a student-directed learning block during the school day, after-school enrichment activities, and enhanced teacher collaboration.

PERSONAL LEARNING TIME

Adding 45 minutes to the school day allowed Pioneer to create personal learning time (PLT), a block of time that is completely self-directed by students and designed around topics they are interested in and questions they want to solve. Because PLT is student-directed and students get to focus on something they are passionate or curious about, there has been great engagement, says teacher Paul Crossen. "It's something they gravitated to and liked a lot. It didn't take much motivation to get them interested."

Nelson-Steinhoff agrees: "Everyone said personal learning time was their favorite time of day."

Each teacher has the flexibility to facilitate PLT in a way that makes the most sense for the class, but the overall goal is to give students the resources, time, and materials they need to dive in, discover, and create through a project-based learning approach. The deliverable, or "learning product," at the end of a project is determined by the student, but involves sharing and presenting the knowledge gleaned during the process to classmates as well as the community. (Parents and family members often come in for presentations.)

ENRICHMENTS

In addition to a project-based, student-centered learning block during the day, Pioneer implemented 320-Plus, an optional enrichment block at the end of each day. From 3:20 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., students participate in Zumba, Taekwondo, soccer, chemistry exploration, knitting, homework club, yoga, and a range of other activities provided by 25 to 30 community partners. At the beginning of every three-month cycle, students and parents are given a menu of upcoming activities, and teachers work to invite particular students to activities that may be of academic or personal interest. On any given day, one-third to one-half of all Pioneer students choose to stay for 320-Plus activities, Nelson-Steinhoff says. To help facilitate the partnerships with community organizations, Nelson-Steinhoff hired a 0.3-staff community partner liaison.

ENHANCED TEACHER COLLABORATION

By expanding the day and rethinking the schedule and staffing, the Pioneer team has also increased common collaboration time from 40 minutes once a week to 80 minutes each day. During that time, teachers plan for instruction by using their Biliteracy Unit Frameworks; meet with leadership to discuss student growth and struggles, based on what has been observed anecdotally and through data; and focus on instructional changes.

IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

Implementing a new learning model and expanding the school day came with a few challenges. Below are some of Pioneer’s challenges and solutions.

CHALLENGES

SOLUTIONS

Extend school day by 45 minutes

Worked with Boulder Valley School District and the teachers union to create a 7.5-hour day. One hundred percent of Pioneer teachers also agreed to go above and beyond their contract to participate in weekly, whole group collaboration from 3:40 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. But transportation continues to be an issue. Since the district has 48 elementary schools, changing the bus schedule was not feasible, making it challenging for students who rely on bus transportation to participate in 320-Plus.

Fund 320-Plus programs on a limited budget

Supported through grants, a fundraising gala, and partnership with the school’s parent-teacher organization.

Develop enrichment programs for students

Partnered with Destination Imagination advisors and community partners to develop unique, quality programming.

Build 320-Plus program organization

Hired one 0.3-staff community partner liaison to manage and facilitate community partnerships.

Increase collaboration among staff

Gained teacher support for additional collaboration time (from 3:40 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. once each week). Teachers also collaborate with team members 80 minutes each day.



Students enjoyed a fun-filled week of swimming field trips at a rec center.

WHAT'S NEXT?

To continue providing the best bilingual learning opportunities for students, Pioneer staff is committed to:

REFINE ITS MISSION + VISION

An ongoing review of Pioneer's mission and vision is critical to student success. "If we really look at our beliefs, mission, and vision, and ensure all of our instructional focus and new pieces fit together, then we can hold each other accountable and improve consistency," Nelson-Steinhoff says.

EXPAND 320-PLUS ENRICHMENTS

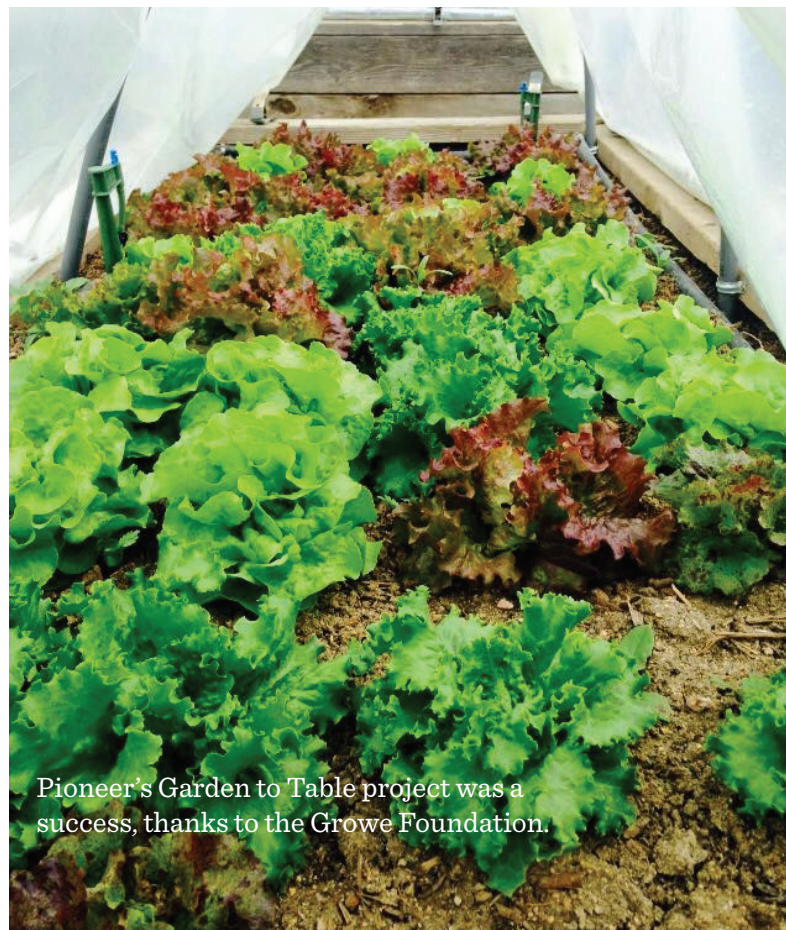
For now, transportation schedules and lack of funding have limited 320-Plus enrichments to an optional program for students who can arrange alternative transportation. The team has looked into purchasing an additional bus for the school or expanding the length of the day further. Team members hope to find a realistic option over the next few years so all students may access high-quality extracurricular enrichments on a daily basis.

INCREASE STUDENT-DRIVEN LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The success Pioneer has had with PLT has inspired educators to consider how student-driven and project-based learning opportunities can be woven into a greater portion of the school day — perhaps even become the basis for the full day. Because students get to choose what to focus on during PLT, engagement is significant, says Crossen. Creating a "maker space" — a dedicated room filled with various supplies so students can build, design, play, and experiment during PLT — is on Crossen's brainstorm list. Although ideas like this one are still evolving, the entire Pioneer community has seen the enormous boost in engagement when learners get to make choices and have a real voice in their learning experiences.



Students show off their school pride by dressing up for Mustache Day during Spirit Week.



Pioneer's Garden to Table project was a success, thanks to the Growe Foundation.

PROOF OF IMPACT

Pioneer has made great progress in increasing opportunity, student-centered learning, and personalized experiences. While it's still too early to assess any data on academic growth, early indicators are promising. For example, Pioneer only has 11 percent of students on Read Plans (state-designated plans for students significantly below reading level). Pioneer is also moving a majority of students between levels on English language acquisition exams — a good indication that immersion programs are working.

According to Nelson-Steinhoff, parents have been very receptive to the changes. “Parents love the enrichments,” she says. “They just rave about them. Many love being invited into their student’s classroom [during PLT] to watch their kids present what they have learned.”

Over the next few years, Pioneer will use the data it is currently collecting to help enhance the learning model.



OTHER RESOURCES

Learn about other expanded learning time schools:

[Angevine Middle School](#)

[Centennial Elementary School](#)

[Godsman Elementary School](#)

[Pennington Elementary School](#)

Read our guidebook to learn how to bring community partners to your school:

[Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning: A Toolkit](#)



Image

Students got a chance to get wet at the Pioneer Family Carnival dunk tank.

Left

Second-graders celebrate with a Moroccan tea party.

THANK YOU
TO ALL THE PIONEER 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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