

A photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, smiling at the camera. The boy on the left is wearing a red sweatshirt with the 'College View' logo. The girl on the right is wearing a green sweatshirt with the same logo. The background is a simple indoor setting with a window. The image is overlaid with a geometric design consisting of a grey triangle in the top left, a yellow triangle in the top right, and a grey triangle in the bottom right.

COLLEGE VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OFFERING MORE TIME FOR PLAY AND LEARNING



THE
COLORADO
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE

April 2016

INTRODUCTION

Walking through the colorful halls of College View Elementary School and hearing all the laughter and learning happening in each classroom, it is hard to believe just three years ago College View was the ninth-worst performing school in Denver Public Schools. Over the past few years, Principal Kyle Gamba has led his team through a dramatic restructuring that has included a 70-minute extension of the school day, guaranteed purposeful play and enrichment for every student, daily technology immersion, longer recess, and a new culture of creativity and innovation — all with a deep focus on nurturing children's characters.



SNAPSHOT OF COLLEGE VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (2015-2016)



474

Total students



94%

Students receiving
free and reduced lunch



46%

English language
learners

100%

Participation in
essential enrichments

5th

Poorest school in
Denver Public Schools



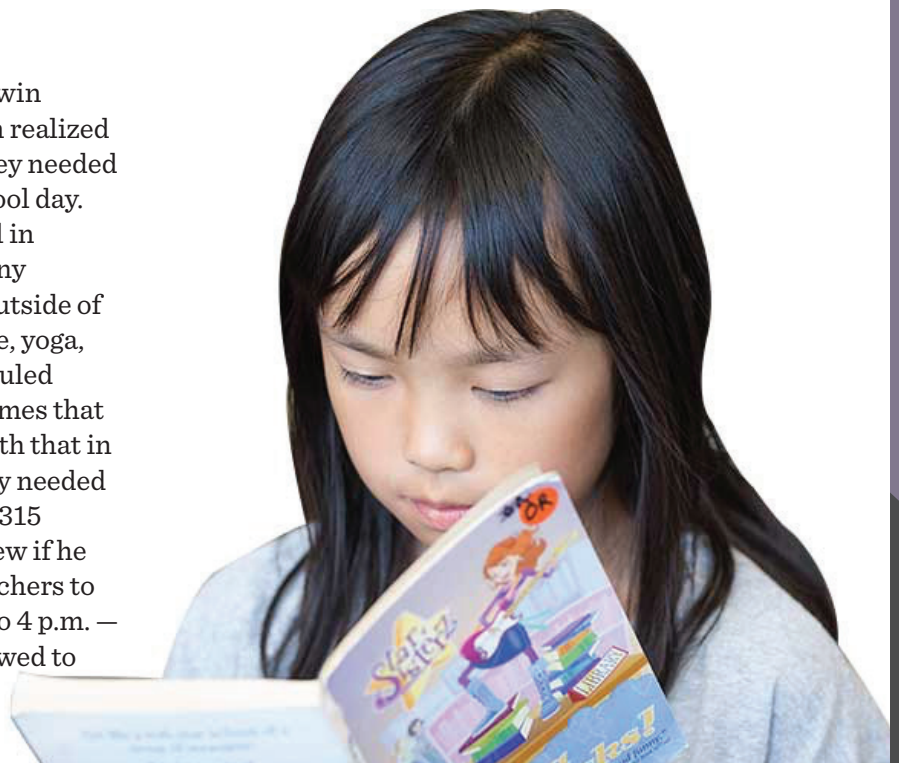
Source: 2015-16 School Choice and Enrollment Snapshot:
College View Elementary School, Denver Public Schools, 2015.
Available at <http://www.dpsk12.org/schoollist/School.aspx?id=220>.

WHY EXPAND LEARNING TIME?

From the outset, College View wanted to find new ways to cultivate the holistic potential of its students, so any initiatives or different approaches would need to create space to address both academic growth and character development. “At College View, we are as passionate about character as we are about academics,” Gamba says.

It wasn’t long after committing to these “twin rocks” of success that Gamba and his team realized there was no way to get students where they needed to be without adding more time to the school day. College View was the fifth-neediest school in Denver in terms of family income, and many opportunities for enriching experiences outside of school, like art classes, sports teams, dance, yoga, and so on, were often expensive and scheduled during the late afternoon and evening — times that were out of reach for working families. With that in mind, College View educators decided they needed to be creative. With a teacher contract for 315 minutes of instruction per day, Gamba knew if he and his team could figure out a way for teachers to be at school for the full day — from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. — without exceeding the time they were allowed to

teach, they could boost experiences for kids. This experimentation around time fit in perfectly with the goals of the TIME Collaborative and the support the cohort was offering for schools, so College View took a leap and joined in the initiative.



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 College View Elementary, 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.

IMPLEMENTING A NEW MODEL

In joining the TIME Collaborative and pursuing expanded learning time, College View aimed to provide students with more time for academic extensions, greater freedom in technological exploration, and opportunities for self-discovery through essential life experiences. But the most important element was a focus on the whole child, not just segmented parts of a student's experience.

"When we started we had this big mission and vision session, and we talked about what we wanted for kids. Assessment didn't come up once. What did was being a good person and ensuring our students have the skills necessary to be successful," Gamba says. To get there, the first step College View took was to add 70 minutes of time each day, which added up to 25 more "traditional-length" school days over the course of the year. During the first year of implementation, those 70 minutes were used to add a 40-minute technology block and a 30-minute "drop-everything-and-read" block. In the midst of this first year, though, the College View team quickly realized that although extended time with students was an exciting prospect, if it wasn't being used effectively there wasn't much point. And although the extra time was a good start, the team observed it wasn't truly changing the student experience.

So the leadership team reorganized the school day and made a handful of changes. First, College View extended schoolwide morning meetings that were typically 15 minutes to 30 minutes. This time is used to focus in and highlight the qualities the elementary school wants to nurture in students, like grit, perseverance, curiosity, and social awareness. (All of these qualities were drawn from research on positive psychology and characteristics that successful people, like Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi, embodied.)

"During our morning meetings, we greet each other with a handshake, high-five, or fist pump; wish each other good morning; and then talk about a character strength," Gamba says. Sometimes students and teachers will watch a video or they will act out a scenario that demonstrates a quality. The goal is to help students recognize these qualities in themselves and others, and to practice them.



Next, College View shifted how the technology and drop-everything-and-read blocks were being used, making room for 40 minutes of “play with purpose” — a daily extended, structured recess/physical education period that encourages students to explore a variety of play-oriented enrichments. For Gamba and his team, giving young children the time to move their bodies, exercise, and play each day was nonnegotiable, given what research and best practice demonstrate about movement and well-being. The team also established 15-minute “brain breaks” throughout the day, facilitated by City Year volunteers, which gives learners time to relax, regroup, and refocus before transitioning to the next topic. While the students are letting off steam, teachers have an opportunity to prepare for the next lesson, allowing both students and teachers to remain prepared and focused throughout the day.

Another shift the team made was adding a 90-minute essentials block that included yoga, poetry, soccer, music, and other enrichments. Every other day, students attend an essential, and during the first six weeks of school, students rotate through all the various essentials so they can choose which activity they want to explore deeply for the next eight to 10 weeks of the quarter. Beyond the regularly scheduled essentials, College View also implemented enrichment days once a month in which community partners from across Denver come to campus for three hours in the afternoon to create immersive experiences. (Staff participates in professional development during this time.)

With all of these changes, College View shifted away from the expectation that enriching experiences usually happen after school instead of during the school day. “Why wait until after school to have tennis?” Gamba asks. “Instead, we made it an essential so all kids can experience tennis for 10 weeks during the school day.”

ENRICHING A COMMUNITY

“When we say ‘a whole child,’ maybe what we should be focusing on is a whole community,” Gamba says. College View works hard to live this idea, opening the Center for Family Opportunity, which is one of the most comprehensive community centers provided by a school. The center offers English as a second language classes, financial literacy courses, job support, legal counseling, citizenship classes, one-to-one financial advising, and more. “What’s so amazing is to see parents on one side of the hallway and then kids on the other side of the hallway learning,” Gamba says. “This is the way to bring up an entire community and ensure it’s not just us working with kids, but instead we’re providing opportunity to everyone.”



CHALLENGES + SOLUTIONS

Implementing a new model or approach always comes with its own set of challenges. Here's what College View had to navigate as it expanded its school day.



Family Buy-In.

When Gamba first announced the expanded day would include an extended recess period, he witnessed mixed reactions among parents. “Many parents thought this would be an open time for kids to be kids,” he explains, but upon learning it would be a more structured exploration led by staff, some parents were initially disappointed. Following many conversations with families, Gamba decided the best way to guarantee success would be to bring parents into the fold early to become their child’s partner in education and influence the model.



Meaningful Use of Technology.

Another challenge College View has overcome is the integration and use of technology in meaningful ways. From the beginning, Gamba and his team were committed to improving students’ computer literacy through a technology block. College View implemented an adaptive software solution to help students become more comfortable using computers productively. Two years later, Gamba realized the software was not having any measurable impact on student outcomes. The team recruited a teacher to completely rewrite the technology curriculum so that it is no longer a separate, 45-minute block, but instead is integrated in a way that reinforces academic growth and character development throughout the day.

PROOF OF IMPACT

College View is still in the early stages of evaluating the impact expanded learning time has had on student outcomes. Over the past two years, it has leapfrogged 80 other schools on standardized assessments, but there is a lot of work yet to do. As of now, College View is at about 50 percent proficiency, Gamba shares, which means it still has work to do. “It’s much better than where we were. The needle is definitely moving, but we’re not quite

there yet,” he says. For students, the changes have injected a noticeable energy into the entire College View experience that has been absent for far too long. “We are building relationships, and the kids feel it,” Gamba says. “You walk in the school and see high-fives left and right. It is a very different student culture here.” Only time will tell what impact this culture will create on long-term success.

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Kyle Gamba, College View principal

THANK YOU
TO THE COLLEGE VIEW TEAM FOR SHARING YOUR STORY WITH US.
YOU'RE AN INSPIRATION FOR WHAT
THE FUTURE OF LEARNING CAN HOLD.



THE
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1660 Lincoln Street
Suite 2000
Denver, CO 80264
303-736-6477
coloradoedinitiative.org

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The Colorado Education Initiative (CEI) is an independent nonprofit working in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education, educators, schools, districts, and other public education stakeholders to unlock the unique potential of every student by incubating innovation, shining a spotlight on success, and investing in sustainable change that improves outcomes for all students. CEI envisions that every student in Colorado is prepared and unafraid to succeed in school, work, and life, and ready to take on the challenges of today, tomorrow, and beyond.

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