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Educators Urged to Give Expanded Learning a Seat at the Table

By [Nora Fleming](#) on May 26, 2011 9:57 AM | [No comments](#) | [No recommendations](#)

Out-of-school-time programs and school day programs operate in separate silos, with OST programs pushed to "prove [their] worthiness" to "have a seat at the education table," wrote [Helen Janc Malone yesterday](#) in the "Futures of School Reform" blog on our *Education Week* site.

"This shows a misunderstanding of what these programs are designed to do, a narrow definition of what constitutes learning, and an over-eagerness to measure every form of knowledge acquisition against the same yardstick," she writes.

Malone's post, "Prove It!" is from the blog associated with a seven-part Commentary series organized by the Harvard Graduate School of Education that has been running in *Education Week* since late March. [The Futures of School Reform series](#) emanates from a national working group of more than a dozen education scholars and policymakers. In addition to the Commentary series, the group contributed to the time-limited [Futures blog](#) where they, and others, continue to offer opinions on improving education in the United States.

According to Malone, there is a continued push to have out-of-school-time programs measure up against the same standards that school day classes do: accountability based on standardized test scores and other academic performance markers like grades and attendance. Yet some of the most important outcomes from these programs cannot be evaluated by the same criteria, she says, particularly given that many create "diverse learning pathways for children and youth, particularly in low-income communities."

"Prove It!" ran in conjunction with the essay, ["Why Attention Will Return to Non-School Factors,"](#) co-authored by Jeffrey Henig, a professor at Columbia University, and Paul Reville, Massachusetts' secretary of education. Henig and Reville argue that "non-school factors," such as nutrition, health, enrichment, and safety, among others, deserve just as much attention in remedying and improving our education system as academic performance. A schools-only approach, they write, will spell doom for reform efforts.

Both pieces advocate improved data sharing and cohesion between the two (the typical school program and any "other") that will support what Reville/Henig call a "broader idea of child development," and Malone calls "new images of what learning looks like," themes that reminded me of a breakout session I attended last week at [the Wallace Forum](#).

I sat in a group discussion assessing what federal, state, and local policy and practice barriers exist surrounding the use of time outside the standard school day and how new policy strategies may overcome them.

[James Shelton](#), assistant deputy secretary for innovation and improvement at the federal Department of Education, and [Jennifer Peck](#), executive director of the California-based organization Partnership for Children and Youth, moderated a discussion with leaders in the out-of-school-time and expanded-learning field, many of whom echoed similar sentiments: Continued barriers often exist between these programs and the school sites, mostly stemming from lack of information sharing, differing sources of funding, and perceived differences in programming and goals.

But many of these opinions aren't based in fact, the group said. Poor academic performance and attendance are often a result of the outside factors (behavior, health, lack of enrichment activities) that many expanded learning-time models and out-of-school-time programs work to improve, meaning the goals for student outcomes are actually linked.

Additionally, many schools are unaware that they can use federal funding streams, like Title I and School Improvement Grants, for expanded learning programs such as the Cincinnati summer learning program [I wrote about previously](#). And some student-data, such as [attendance records, can be shared](#) between the school

and community providers that offer supplementary programming to students.

Many group members concluded that expanded learning-time models, or adding more well-designed time to the school days, weeks, and years (the theme of the forum), could offer solutions by changing the standards by which we measure accountability on state and federal levels. These models, group members said, could incentivize schools and programs to look at both academic and "nonschool" factors that when linked and supported can improve learning outcomes and general child development.