Rochester Case Study:  
The Case of Collaboration between District Leadership and  
Community Organizations

This case study is part of a broader study by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) of grantees under the Ford Foundation’s More and Better Learning Time (MBLT) initiative. The study aimed to learn more about the motivation to pursue MBLT policies, the impact of MBLT grants, and the conditions and approaches found in schools that have successfully implemented and sustained MBLT. This is one of three case studies that focus on locations where MBLT reform activities were implemented.

People Interviewed

CEP conducted five interviews in February of 2016 with individuals who played key roles in the adoption and subsequent implementation of MBLT in Rochester. All interviewees were selected based on input from the Ford Foundation. Below is a list of interviewees, their position and organization, and their relation to MBLT.

**Mairéad Hartmann**—Former Program Officer, Rochester Area Community Foundation  
The Rochester Area Community Foundation helps build the capacity of community providers to support high quality MBLT implementation. She is currently employed by the University of Rochester.

**Paul Hetland**, Treasurer, Rochester Teachers Association  
Hetland is a former RCSD teacher who now serves as a union official representing the district’s teachers.

**Caterina Leone-Mannino**, Principal of Enrico Fermi School No. 17, RCSD  
Prior to becoming a school principal, Leone-Mannino was RCSD’s Director of Expanded Learning. She played a critical role in the inception and implementation of MBLT in Rochester.

**Dwayne Mahoney**, Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club of Rochester  
The Boys and Girls Club of Rochester is an external provider of MBLT activities at a number of schools within the district.

**Dr. Bolgen Vargas**, Former Superintendent, Rochester City School District (RCSD)  
Dr. Vargas was superintendent from 2012–2015 during the initial push to adopt MBLT activities. He is currently superintendent of the Manchester, New Hampshire, school district.
Overview of Rochester City School District

The Rochester City School District is located in Rochester, New York, and serves approximately 30,000 students in 123 schools. According to the New York State Education Department’s RCSD school report card for the 2014-15 school year, 59% of students were African-American, 27% were Hispanic, 10% were white, and 4% of students were Asian/Native American/East Indian/other (see table 1). The district, which serves a large population of economically disadvantaged students\(^1\) (91%), has the highest poverty rate among New York State’s Big Five districts.

Table 1. Student demographics and academic outcomes, 2011-12 vs. 2014-15

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<tr>
<td>% Black or African American</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>% eligible for free or reduced-price meals</td>
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<td>86</td>
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<td>% Limited English Proficient</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>% dropouts</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>% graduating in cohort</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>% proficient in grades 3-8 ELA assessment</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>% proficient in grades 3-8 math assessment</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>% students with Regents or local diplomas who reported their post-graduation plans to be attending a 4-year college</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% students with Regents or local diplomas who reported their post-graduation plans to be attending a 2-year college</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of suspensions</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>2,091</td>
<td>95,820 (2013-14)</td>
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MBLT History in Rochester

According to RCSD’s 2014-2018 action plan, MBLT is one of three key district priorities to raise student achievement. To justify the use of MBLT, the action plan states:

In high-poverty districts like Rochester, students need more time and support than students in higher-income districts, where most families are able to provide higher

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\(^1\) New York State defines economically disadvantaged students as those who participate in, or whose family participates in, economic assistance programs, such as the free or reduced-price school lunch programs, Social Security Insurance (SSI), Food Stamps, Foster Care, Refugee Assistance (cash or medical assistance), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), or Family Assistance: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). If one student in a family is identified as low income, all students from that household (economic unit) may be identified as low income.
levels of support at home. Yet before the 2013-14 school year, Rochester students received the least instructional time of any group of student in Monroe County and were among the lowest in the nation. (Rochester City School District, 2014, p. 7)

MBLT started as a pilot program during the 2012-13 school year. Schools interested in participating in the pilot, which was funded by the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL), were required to submit ELT plans to the district and, if approved, engage in a planning year (Macaluso, 2013). Although several schools were initially chosen to take part in the planning year, only two schools were invited to implement their ELT plans. The two schools, an elementary and a secondary school, became known as “cohort one” schools.

RCSD adhered to NCTL’s ELT model, which calls for 300 additional school hours—100 more hours than were required by NYSED.2 Caterina Leone-Mannino, RCSD’s former director of expanded learning, noted that the decision to go beyond the state-mandated additional time was influenced by research indicating that “300 hours is a tipping point,” and added that “the cost of doing an extra 100 hours that are validated [by research] was minimal compared to the benefit that was yielded from doing it.” NCTL monitored the planning phase and subsequent first-year implementation of ELT in cohort one, documented what these two schools were doing, and provided individualized technical assistance.

While NCTL handled the initial MBLT logistics, the district’s role was to continually coordinate with schools to ensure that they had sufficient resources to facilitate MBLT. “The district coordination was more on a making things available kind of method [whereas] the structural stuff was done by the National Center on Time & Learning,” said Paul Hetland, treasurer of the Rochester Teachers Association. Most of the day-to-day coordination was managed by school leadership. Dwayne Mahoney of the Boys and Girls Club of Rochester said that community partners worked together with school leadership to “try to figure out with the school what services they wanted, how it’s going to get staged, and how the schedule will be implemented.”

In the 2013-14 school year, the district expanded cohort one to include five additional schools.4 These five schools engaged in the year-long planning process, while the original cohort one schools began their first year of implementation. First year implementation for the additional five schools took place during the 2014-15 school year. Successive cohorts were organized each year thereafter. Leone-Mannino

2 RCSD operates elementary schools, which generally serve students in grades K-6, and secondary schools, which generally serve students in grades 7-12. There are no middle schools in Rochester.

3 In its request for a federal ESEA waiver from some NCLB requirements, the state of New York “established the minimum amount of Expanded Learning Time that must be incorporated into the redesign of the school day, week, and/or year for Priority Schools. Expanded Learning Time programs funded by the State Education Department must include enrichment and acceleration for all program participants, including opportunities for programs such as in music and art. The program must expand learning time by a minimum of 200 student contact hours per year beyond the current mandated length of 900 hours per year of instruction in elementary school and 990 hours per year in high school” (p. 108).

4 Referred to as cohort one expansion schools.
explained that at the time of the case study interview in February 2016, “we now had the original pilot, the five additional schools from cohort one, five schools in cohort two, and now there’s a cohort three that’s engaged in the planning process.” At the time of this report, 13 schools in RCSD were implementing MBLT.

Funding for MBLT

Funding for MBLT in Rochester comes from several different sources at the federal, state, and local levels. At the federal level, RCSD relied on 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program funds, through New York State’s No Child Left Behind waiver, and School Improvement Grants (SIG). State funding for MBLT came from the New York State Department’s Extended Learning Time Grant Program, initiated during the 2013-14 school year. That competitive grant program supports schoolwide learning opportunities in extended school day and/or school year programs, with a focus on improving academic achievement; all school districts have the option to apply. Additional funding sources cited by interviewees included grants from the Rochester Area Community Foundation (a local source), and financial support from the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time and Learning.5

This study looks at some of more and better learning time activities in RCSD to see what is happening in successful MBLT initiatives throughout the district. Successful MBLT activities in RCSD showed the following characteristics:

- **Focus on student needs and equity.** All interviewees discussed the importance of using MBLT as a way to address opportunity gaps between RCSD and more affluent neighboring districts.

- **Community organizations.** In successful schools, MBLT programs were embraced by community organizations and were strategically used to provide services.

- **Initial planning.** Successful MBLT programs engaged a thorough planning process that described in detailed the components and elements of a redesigned school day.

- **Addressing and mitigating challenges.** The MBLT programs that were successful identified issues, such as providing meals to students in an extended day, and addressed them expeditiously.

- **Improved outcomes.** Successful MBLT programs not only increased student achievement, but also impacted important non-academic outcomes, including higher student attendance and an improved school culture.

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5 For additional information on ELT funding in New York State see http://www.nysan.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/WHITEPAPER2016.pdf
Motivation for MBLT

The impetus to implement MBLT in the Rochester City School District stemmed from several factors including student need, success of the district’s after-school and summer programs, observations of MBLT activities in other districts, and federal and state policies.

Student need

Student need was a significant inspiration for MBLT in Rochester, according to several people interviewed for this case study. Hetland explained that a key motivation for MBLT was “concern with the kinds of offerings and the relative lacks that kids in urban districts faced in terms of arts, music, sports, drama, and other things that are thought to be secondary or enrichment.” Similarly, former RCSD superintendent Dr. Bolgen Vargas viewed MBLT as “the key strategy to close the opportunity gap that exists between city school districts and neighboring schools” and as “a way to address the disparity that exists between our district and middle class districts.” The decision to adopt MBLT was also intended to address the fact that Rochester offered the least amount of instructional time of any big city in the country, said Vargas. Providing students with additional instructional time via MBLT would put RCSD on par with other urban districts in the state.

After-school and summer programs

Leone-Mannino noted that the success of the district’s summer school and after-school programs for academically underperforming students triggered an interest in expanding the school day. Students participating in these programs “were more motivated in their self-esteem about learning,” she said, and “we couldn’t help but to consider the impact” of extending academic enrichment activities through an extended day.

Even though students participating in RCSD summer school and after-school programs were improving academically, Leone-Mannino was dissatisfied with student participation. She felt that the district was spending too much money and using too many resources on programs that was voluntary and had “50 percent participation on a good day.” Thus, embedding academic enrichment activities into the school day via MBLT would enable the district to reach more students.

Seeing MBLT activities in other districts

A few interviewees indicated that observing MBLT’s impact in other districts furthered RCSD’s interest in expanding the school day. Specifically, district officials and leaders of the Greater Rochester After-school Alliance traveled to Providence, Rhode Island, to visit the Providence Afterschool Alliance. That trip “sparked a lot of ideas” especially about the value of community partners in an extended school day setting, said Mairéad Hartmann, former program officer for the Rochester Area Community Foundation. Hartmann commented that, “one really compelling component of what we learned when we visited Providence was about how they were doing joint professional development and how they were bringing community partners into school settings to essentially co-teach with the teaching staff.” Also influential
were the visits made by Dr. Vargas and the president of the RTA to Cincinnati schools engaged in MBLT, according to Paul Hetland.

**Federal and state policies**

Federal and state policies were also motivators for MBLT in Rochester. “I don’t think we would have been able to get the momentum going without the pressure from the federal government and the power of the state of New York to get the extended school day,” said Vargas. At the time when RCSD was considering MBLT strategies, both the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) adopted policies that encouraged and increased funding for expanded learning time (ELT).

At the federal level, ED began granting waivers of certain No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements to states with approved state plans outlining how they would comply with certain federal conditions. As one such condition, states had to agree to implement specific interventions to improve student achievement in their lowest-performing Title I schools, called priority and focus schools. One of the required federal “turnaround principles” for reforming priority schools was to “redesign the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 7). To help facilitate ELT, ED gave school districts flexibility to shift a portion of their federal Title I dollars toward ELT. In addition, under the NCLB waivers, states could use federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds to expand learning time during the regular school day; these funds were previously limited to before or after-school programs and services. To receive 21st CCLC funds under New York State’s NCLB waiver, community learning centers were required to partner with individual schools identified for improvement (New York State Education Department, 2012).

ELT also became a major focal point of the federal School Improvement Grant program, which provides funds to states via a formula. States, in turn, award SIG funds to school districts through competitive grants and districts use those funds to improve low-performing Title I schools. Under its NCLB waiver, New York State required districts seeking SIGs to expand the learning day by a minimum of 200 hours per school year for all students in a funded schools (New York State Education Department, 2012).

**Outcomes Associated with MBLT**

Multiple interviewees associated MBLT with positive results. Some interviewees pointed to improved academic outcomes, while others highlighted non-academic outcomes, such as increased school attendance and a stronger sense of community.

RCSD’s 2014-2018 action plan indicated that there is preliminary evidence that suggests that MBLT has improved achievement, attendance, student and teacher relationships, and student behavior problems at expanded learning schools.

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6 Either partner could be the lead fiscal agent.
Student academic achievement

When talking about the impact of ELT on student outcomes, Leone-Mannino referred to an unpublished 2015 internal district evaluation. The study, which compared fall-to-spring growth in state assessment scores for matched pairs of students, revealed that students in cohort one ELT schools scored 5.3 percentile points higher on average in reading growth and 4.5 percentile points higher on average in math growth than did their matched pairs in non-ELT schools (Rochester City School District, 2015). The results, which were statistically significant, indicated that students in MBLT schools in that study had higher academic growth relative to their peers in non-MBLT schools after controlling for observable student characteristics.

Enhanced school climate and other non-academic outcomes

Interviewees attributed several non-academic outcomes to MBLT. For instance, Hartmann cited preliminary data from the American Institutes for Research suggesting that expanding the learning day increased school attendance. Similarly, Mahoney associated MBLT with more student engagement and increased student social and emotional learning. An improved school climate was also evident to former superintendent Vargas, who observed “movement in terms of kids being understood, more happy, and more comfortable with their school.” Leone-Mannino, principal of an MBLT school from Cohort two, noted that her school had seen a decrease in several climate indicators, including the number of discipline referrals and student absenteeism. Moreover, she commented, her school “feels like a more loving and happy place to be than it has for three years, and everybody notes that, from every stakeholder.”

Other non-academic outcomes beyond school climate were associated with MBLT according to interviewees. For example, Hetland said that MBLT schools have fostered a more collaborative environment among staff and a “stronger sense of community,” while adding that these types of outcomes are “discounted by a lot of folks on the outside” who only “want to see these external measures of test scores and graduation rates and so on.” One of the “great successes” of MBLT, according to Hartmann, “is the ability to expand upon those opportunities for young people so that they can not only enjoy themselves but engage their minds in a different way that is developmentally appropriate and beneficial for them, in terms of both their success in school as well as their social and emotional development.”

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7 The study used propensity score matching (PSM) to create matched-pair comparisons of fall-to-spring growth on state assessment data. PSM is a type of statistical analysis used to estimate the causal effects of non-experimental, observational data. Schneider et al. (2008) explain that PSM “approximates randomized assignment since students within each of the remaining bins or strata have a roughly equal probability (based on their aggregate characteristics) of being selected into either the treatment or control condition” (p. 50).
Conditions Allowing for MBLT Success

Interviewees identified several elements that enabled MBLT to be successful in Rochester. These include strong leadership at the district and school levels, sufficient planning time, extra teacher collaboration time, and collaboration with both community partners and the district’s teachers association.

Leadership

District leaders play a crucial role in policy reform by articulating a clear vision and a set of expectations for schools. According to several interviewees, the two leaders driving MBLT in Rochester were former RCSD superintendent Vargas and Adam Urbanski, the president of the Rochester Teachers Association. Vargas mentioned that Urbanski was very supportive of MBLT from the onset and that his leadership was essential to getting the policy off the ground. Hartmann asserted that former RCSD superintendent Vargas was a clear supporter of MBLT and would “talk often and publically about the need to increase time in school for students in the Rochester City School District.”

In addition to strong district level leadership, school-based leadership played a vital role in MBLT adoption. In the schools where MBLT had been successful, Hartmann said, the school leadership “was able to really achieve buy-in with the teaching staff, and that certainly benefits everyone all around when the teachers are willing to adjust their schedules... and also understand the relationship with the community partners and their staff.”

Mahoney also emphasized the importance of school leadership. “It comes down to [the district] selecting a really dynamic principal to operate the school,” he said. “We’ve had three principals in three years [at one particular school we collaborated with], so this principal I think really has a plan and then we’re really a component of helping her execute the plan.”

Initial MBLT planning

Most schools were required to participate in a planning year prior to MBLT implementation, but there were exceptions. Vargas excused a cohort one school from the planning year because in his opinion the school needed MBLT urgently. In the view of multiple interviewees, schools that engaged in a year of planning prior to implementation tended to be more successful in rolling out MBLT than were schools that did not have the opportunity to plan. Hartmann considered planning time to be a crucial condition for successful MBLT implementation:

[Planning time gave schools] a full school year to really think about and plan for and be coached and trained in what the components and elements of a redesigned school day might include. And in the best circumstances, they’ve already identified a community partner that they have a history of working with, and that community partner has gone through the training with them, so that at the end of those 5 to 8 months, the community partners, the school staff, the building leadership are all familiar with each other. They’ve created the plan together, and they are ready for implementation.
Schools that experienced MBLT implementation problems tended to not have the benefit of a full year of planning. Moreover, according to Hartmann, those schools generally didn’t self-select MBLT, but were “on the priority list for the state as one of the lowest-performing schools, and the state required them to add 200 additional hours.” For these schools, the decision to pursue MBLT was made and rolled out quickly, which limited opportunities for planning and securing stakeholder buy-in.

**Increased collaboration time and professional development for teachers**

Rochester case study participants also viewed additional opportunities for professional development and collaboration that aims to improve the quality of teaching as essential conditions for MBLT success. According to Principal Leone-Mannino, expanding teacher time was necessary “because the heart and soul of what's wrong in the school is teaching and learning, with everything else, right?” As a result, Leone-Mannino used some of the additional time stemming from MBLT to “help build the instructional quality.” Specifically, she gave teachers more time to plan lessons, examine student data, and work collaboratively in a common planning session.

**Community partners**

Community partners engaged in youth development were instrumental in Rochester’s MBLT implementation and adoption. Both Mahoney and Hartmann surmised that these partners were more willing to embrace MBLT because of their longstanding relationship and familiarity with the RCSD from their work with the district’s summer and after-school’s programs. Community partners “really did quickly think on their feet, learn about the opportunities related to more and better learning time, and really began to demonstrate significant flexibility in their own operations so that they could become expanded learning time partners for the Rochester City School District,” said Hartmann. Integrating community partners into the school day became seamless, so that “students really don’t have any idea, for example, whether Ms. Wright works with the Boys and Girls club or does she work for the Rochester School District.”

Hartmann also commended the Rochester district for embracing the idea of incorporating community partners and providing joint professional development for teachers and staff from community partners. Prior to the implementation of MBLT, community partners did not have much interaction with the district’s central office, and instead worked directly with each individual school. Not only did working directly with schools rather than through the district’s central office allow outside providers to build relationships with school-based staff, but they also developed a mutual understanding of what MBLT and enrichment meant.

Principal Leone-Mannino welcomed the support provided by community partners in her school and recognized their value. For instance, bringing community partners into the school enabled her to strategically reallocate resources for both certified and non-certified staff, while “flooding grade levels with support.” Moreover, embedding community partners into the school day gave her newfound flexibility in scheduling.
Teachers association

Former Superintendent Bolgen Vargas emphasized that officials from the Rochester Teachers Association (RTA) were very supportive of MBLT from the outset. Not only did RTA officials accompany Vargas on visits to schools implementing extended day policies, but they also reached out to the Ford Foundation to discuss MBLT. The mutual interest of Vargas and the RTA in adopting MBLT enabled the district to work collaboratively through some of the challenges inherent in implementing and adopting a policy as intricate and far reaching as MBLT. According to Hetland, the RTA encouraged its members to “take hold of this [MBLT] in an imaginative content-based way. Think about not what they could fit into the day, but what they wanted schooling to do for the students.” When asked what advice he would give to other districts considering MBLT, Vargas responded, “Bring your union with you...I’ve noticed that for some of my colleagues [in other districts] this is the area they have had the most trouble in. In Rochester, this was not the case.”

Challenges

RCSD and its individual schools encountered several challenges while implementing MBLT. These challenges include the logistics of working with outside providers, teacher and parent resistance, staff turnover, food service, out-of-school scheduling conflicts, and transportation.

Vargas made this observation about the challenges associated with MBLT:

> It takes time to transform yourself, especially from the district that was giving the least amount of instructional time to one that is aiming to give children not just more time but better time—high-quality instruction, high-quality art, music, extracurricular activity, and high-quality services to address the social emotional needs of kids...It’s not an easy task to do.

Hartmann commented that “we really didn’t realize at the onset just how incredibly impactful the decision to change the school day really would be on all the systems and every little thing that surrounds the school.”

Working with outside providers

Successful implementation and adoption of MBLT in Rochester hinged on the ability of teachers and outside community partners, who traditionally provided only after-school programming, to work collaboratively. Yet Hartmann acknowledged that the two, at least initially, were at odds with each other. “They didn’t agree on what enrichment meant, and there was just some real culture shock between those who normally deliver positive youth development and those who are responsible in a really high-stakes environment for delivering academic outcomes,” Hartmann explained. Mahoney speculated that any animosity between teachers and community organizations may have derived from teachers feeling as if they were being supplanted by outside providers. Hetland recognized that the partnership between schools and outside providers did not always work smoothly,
nor was it instantaneous. This was especially apparent during the early years of MBLT implementation, he said:

People outside of schools often have the sense that schools are like baseball teams: anybody can manage a baseball team. Anybody can teach in a school, or work in a school with kids. Then, the volunteers would show up and there hadn’t been a lot of preparatory work done with them, and they didn’t know what to do.

But the relationship between teachers and outside providers had changed in recent years, said Mahoney, and the district is now actively engaging with community partners. For example, the district now provides professional development and training opportunities jointly to both school-based staff and outside providers.

**Teacher and parent resistance**

Teachers were initially skeptical of MBLT. Their skepticism, according to Hetland, stemmed partially from frequent “program churn and reform churn in Rochester.” In his view, reform fatigue had created an environment where teachers lacked trust in the district. Several interviewees reported that teachers were generally reluctant to buy into any district policies because the district had a history of either turning its attention to other policies or forcing teachers to respond to district mandates without providing sufficient resources.

Leone-Mannino believed that resistance towards MBLT was a result of the changes to the status quo. When policies endanger the status quo, she said, “people themselves feel threatened and so they begin to become resistant.”

Hetland thought that teachers did not have any specific problems with MBLT, but were more concerned with “implementation and imposition.” According to Hetland, teachers felt as if they had little influence on the decision to pursue MBLT, since the NYSED required priority districts and schools applying for SIG money to expand the learning day by a minimum of 200 hours per school year. He further explained that teachers “dislike mandated stuff—especially mandated stuff by people from outside schools who don’t really grasp the internal workings of schools and who disregard or don’t listen to the input of teachers and parents and students inside.”

The district made multiple efforts to mitigate teacher resistance. For instance, the district made teacher participation in MBLT voluntary and guaranteed that any teacher taking part would be compensated accordingly. However, Leone-Mannino pointed out that making MBLT voluntary for some teachers and not others within the same school complicated scheduling.

Parents were generally receptive toward MBLT in Rochester and were very supportive of the idea behind the initiative. According Hartmann, a few families complained about receiving a revised or modified schedule for their children without sufficient notice. “Even though they were grateful for the additional opportunities afforded to their kids, they might not have had sufficient time to make adjustments to their own schedules,” she said.
Staff turnover

Several interviewees indicated that school-level staff turnover can be problematic for schools adopting MBLT activities. Changes in principals “have really impacted the ability of community partners to deliver on their contacts,” said Hartmann, “because either the new principal has concerns about the organization or has a favorite organization that they want to bring in.”

Delays in hiring principals also created implementation challenges, according to Mahoney:

“We’ve had instances where the principal wasn’t hired or the decision on who was going to lead the building wasn’t made until late into the summer. That will always be a challenge because you are starting behind the eight ball... We want to talk about vision more than just for a week or so prior to stepping in a school.”

Food service

Expanding the school day had a notable impact on the district’s ability to provide meals for students. One interviewee specifically mentioned that providing meals to students was a “real logistical challenge,” because schools with MBLT dismissed students later in the day. This meant that schools were responsible for not only providing breakfast and lunch for students, but also dinner. Hartmann explained that dinner would “normally be called after-school meals but now they are part of the school day, but not eligible for the National School Lunch Program.” RCSD was able to overcome this obstacle by working out an agreement with the New York State Department of Health to arrange for Child and Adult Care Food Program funding for after-school meals.

Conflicts with extracurricular activities

Interviewees indicated that MBLT interfered with the timing of interscholastic sports. Because only a few schools within RCSD have implemented MBLT, their dismissal time was not aligned with other schools in the district and surrounding region. As a result, some student athletes needed to leave early for a competition and missed part of the school day. Principal Leone-Mannino explained that she addressed this challenge by adjusting the start time of the school day from 8:45 to 8:00 a.m. and the end time from 5:00 to 4:00 p.m. to better align the dismissal time with non-MBLT schools.

Transportation

Multiple interviewees mentioned that transportation was a huge obstacle. Specifically, Leone-Mannino noted that issues surrounding bussing “dictated the length of the day and the time of the schedule” and mitigating the issue was like “pulling teeth.” Even the timing of stoplights became a challenge, said Hartmann, who explained that at certain intersections the stoplights were timed to coincide with the nearby school “And the timing was off when they expanded the day to end at 5:30 p.m. instead of 3:00 p.m.”
The Future and Sustainability of MBLT in Rochester

Interviewees were generally optimistic about the future of MBLT in Rochester. The only areas of concern they cited were funding and superintendent turnover.

When asked about the future of MBLT in Rochester, all five interviewees believed that it is here to stay. For instance, Leone-Mannino, who linked MBLT’s sustainability in Rochester to federal policy, said “I don’t think [MBLT] is going to go away because the federal [Every Student Succeeds Act] focus on the priority of 300 hours.” She identified a connection between the National Center for Time and Learning’s recommendations and federal legislation and believed that the linkage would enable MBLT to be sustained. Vargas was a bit more guarded, noting that the future of MBLT in Rochester will be secure so long as the NYSED continues to require schools and districts interested in SIG money to expand the learning day by a minimum of 200 hours.

Superintendent turnover

As discussed earlier, strong district leadership is crucial for MBLT to flourish. Yet, several interviewees expressed concern that district leadership changes may jeopardize the future of MBLT in Rochester. After former superintendent Bolgen Vargas left in December of 2015, RCSD had two interim superintendents before the current superintendent, Barbara Deane-Williams, came on in August 2016. This superintendent turnover created a cloud of uncertainty and policy confusion because new superintendents generally have different priorities than their predecessors. For instance, Hetland remarked:

[RCSD has had] an average length of superintendency of a few years. When new superintendents come in, they have new initiatives they want to push. The old initiatives exist, in some sense. There are people still advocating [for] them, but they are somewhat starved, and the new programs are getting more attention...I don’t want to call it cynicism, although it has reached that level in some places.

Similarly, Hartmann expressed concern over the fact that the new superintendent’s agenda had yet to be disclosed. “It’s so tenuous right now where you just don’t know what the new superintendent’s priorities will be.” Hetland echoed this sentiment, noting that the future “depends largely on who the next superintendent is and what that superintendent wants to do, whether that’s a strong person who can actually lead or a person who is a weaker coordinator.”

Funding

Interviewees saw funding as the foremost current challenge for MBLT in Rochester and a major concern for the future sustainability of MBLT. For example, Mahoney questioned how Rochester can maintain MBLT if the district budget for the initiative is shrinking. He linked the district’s decreasing dedicated funding for MBLT to a changing student population and questioned how the district can continue scaling up MBLT while ensuring that students receive the services that they need. Similarly, Hetland said that “funding is a serious problem, and has been for quite a while.” The problem in his view is that “More
and better learning time will run into a conflict created by scarcity" because MBLT will have to compete with other district initiatives.
References


