



Workin' 9 to 5

How School Schedules Make Life Harder for Working Parents

By Catherine Brown, Ulrich Boser, and Perpetual Baffour

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Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

Barack Obama is the commander in chief of the most powerful nation in the world. He oversees more than 2 million federal workers, attends countless meetings, and makes numerous public appearances, duties all requiring that his schedule be mapped out by the minute. But when it comes to parent-teacher conferences, President Obama is just like every other working parent, forced to take off from work in the middle of the day to travel to his children's school.¹

The president's visits to his daughters' school underscore the unrealistic expectations that schools too often have for working parents and the ways in which school policies put pressure on already stretched families. By closing at 3:00 p.m., shutting down intermittently and frequently, hosting important school events in the middle of the day, and more, schools make it really hard for parents to balance their commitments to their children and their jobs.

In fact, when it comes to school schedules, President Obama might actually be lucky. His job at the White House is flexible enough to allow him to make time to travel to his daughters' parent-teacher conferences and other school events. Many working parents do not have that autonomy. In fact, nearly half of all workers report not having any form of flexibility in their work schedules.² Almost 40 percent of all workers do not even have paid vacation time.³

The world has evolved dramatically since the public school schedule first took root. When the school day first evolved, millions of children—many as young as 10 years old—worked, and most mothers stayed at home.⁴ Today, child labor for the most part is outlawed, and 75 percent of women with school-age children work.⁵

But in many ways, schools have not updated their policies to adapt to this changed world, and this means that large numbers of working parents must split their time between being a committed parent and being a committed working professional. This report, then, aims to answer three questions:

- How misaligned are school and work schedules?
- What can schools do to support parents as they try to meet their obligations to their employers and to their children?
- How can schools and districts pay for this effort? There's a short answer to this last query because 9-to-5 school reform is less expensive than most people believe—and does not require teachers to work more for less pay.

To examine these questions, the Center for American Progress analyzed the calendars, schedules, and policies of the largest school districts in the country, which serve almost 6 million students.⁶ CAP researchers also examined data from the National Center for Education Statistics. The resulting analysis reveals the multitude of ways that U.S. public schools make life unnecessarily harder for working parents.

Research findings include:

Throughout the school year, schools are closed for 29 days, more than two workweeks longer than the average private-sector worker has in paid vacation and holidays. While the average private-sector worker with paid leave has 16 days off in paid holidays and vacation,⁷ the largest school districts shut their doors for an average of 29 days each school year.⁸ This 29-day figure excludes summer recess but includes days off during the school year for staff training, special programs, and seasonal breaks, as well as major federal and state holidays such as Memorial Day and Patriots' Day in Massachusetts.⁹

The New York City and Los Angeles school districts have more days off than most—33 and 34, respectively.¹⁰ As a consequence, even if full-time workers devoted all of their paid vacation time and holidays to cover school closings, they would still need to find an alternative way to care for their children on at least 13 days throughout the school year. Notably, the reasons for some closings have little to do with a school's core mission. Some districts will close on the opening day of hunting season, for instance.¹¹

This analysis understates the scope of the problem. First, many working parents do not have paid leave.¹² Part-time workers, for instance, make up 19 percent of the U.S. workforce¹³ and are far less likely than full-time workers to receive paid leave. In fact, only about one-third of these workers receive paid vacation time.¹⁴ What's more, 21 percent of workers are contract workers or under temporary hire—such as agency temps, on-call workers, and independent contractors—and have limited if any access to paid leave.¹⁵ Overall, 39 percent of all workers, and 80 percent of low-wage workers, lack access to paid vacation time.¹⁶ Forty-three percent of all workers also lack access to paid sick leave.¹⁷

If families pay out of pocket for child care to cover the excess school closure days and hours, it would cost an average of \$6,600 per year, or 9 percent of an average family's income. Even families who have paid leave are forced to find other ways to take care of their children when school is closed once they have exceeded their leave benefits. If parents were to pay child care workers their average hourly rate in the United States—\$10.72¹⁸—for every excess day and hour that schools are closed while they are at work, they would owe \$6,600 annually. That amounts to 9 percent of \$70,000, the median income for family households with school-age children.¹⁹ Low-income workers obviously would pay a higher percentage of their income. Families in the lowest income quintile, for instance, earn just \$29,000, and for them, paying \$6,600 for child care is simply out of reach.²⁰

The typical school day does not reflect normal work hours, and most schools close two hours or more before the end of the typical workday. The median school day ends at 2:50 p.m., and virtually every district in the country is closed by 3:30 p.m.²¹ Some districts, such as Palm Beach County in Florida, end the school day as early as 2:05 p.m. in their elementary schools.²² Most districts also hold half days on the first or last day of student attendance, and many schools close as early as 1:00 p.m. once per week. Meanwhile, 70 percent of parents report working between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.²³

Key school events such as parent-teacher conferences are usually scheduled during the day. Districts typically conduct parent-teacher conferences during morning and afternoon hours, when most parents are at work.²⁴ Most districts also close for a full day or several hours early for parent-teacher conferences, even if these meetings last less than 10 minutes per family.²⁵ The Dallas Independent School District in Texas, for instance, closes school at least twice per year for parent-teacher conferences. In Cobb County, Georgia, elementary and middle school students receive an entire week of early dismissals due to these conferences.

Misaligned school schedules cost the U.S. economy \$55 billion in lost productivity annually. School schedules create more than just inconveniences—and additional costs—for working parents. They also drive down economic productivity. First, they result in lower levels of full-time employment among women with elementary-school-age children. According to CAP’s analysis, the gap in full-time employment rates between mothers of elementary-school-age children and mothers of middle- and high-school-age children suggests that more than 1 million fewer mothers of elementary-school-age children are working full time, forfeiting an annual median wage of \$35,000. This lost productivity costs the economy about \$35 billion every year. The authors have dubbed this issue the “Stay-at-Home” problem.

Second, the economy loses productivity due to school closings. When school is closed, many parents have to take time off from work in order to care for their children. To quantify this type of productivity loss, CAP estimated the number of lost hours due to school closings and multiplied it by the average hourly wage of women with elementary-school-age children in the United States. The authors limited the pool of affected workers to households where all residing parents are employed. The result: lost productivity of \$20 billion due to school closings. The authors call this issue the “I Don’t Know How She Does It” problem.

When the authors added these two different analyses together, the figures summed to \$55 billion in lost productivity each year due to misaligned schedules.

Fewer than half of elementary schools and fewer than one-third of low-income schools offer before- and after-school care, and when offered it is often unaffordable. One of the most basic ways that school districts can try to address the gap between school and work schedules is through before- and after-school programs. But only around 45 percent of all public elementary schools actually offer before- and after-school care, according to CAP’s analysis of federal data.²⁶ In several states, in fact, only 15 percent of public schools offer before- and after-school care. In Utah, the figure is as low as 3 percent.²⁷

Low-income schools are actually less likely to offer after-school programs than other schools. Nationally, only 31 percent of Title I schools offer such programs, for instance, compared with 40 percent of schools not eligible for Title I funding.²⁸ Even worse, of the districts that do offer after-school care, few ensure that they are free, discounted, or progressively priced. In this report’s survey of the nation’s largest districts, fewer than one-third make after-school care cheaper or completely free for low-income families.²⁹

The misalignment of school and work schedules has a disparate impact on black, Latino, and low-income working parents. While the misalignment between school and work schedules affects all working parents, this issue disproportionately affects lower-income families. Lower-income workers are more likely to have unpredictable or inflexible work schedules, which makes it difficult for them to arrange child care immediately when needed.³⁰ These parents are also less likely to have paid time off.³¹ Just 53 percent of hourly workers have paid vacation days, compared with 71 percent of salaried workers.³²

Lack of paid leave hits many people of color particularly acutely, since they are far more likely to hold hourly shift jobs that are less flexible.³³ Many workers of color also earn less than their peers, which means that they are less financially able to cover any sudden cost of additional child care. Among full-time working women, for instance, African Americans earn only 81 cents on every \$1 whites make and 67 cents on every \$1 Asians earn. Hispanic women or Latinas earn 75 percent as much as whites and 62 percent as much as Asians.³⁴

Most low-income schools and districts currently receive funding that can be used to improve school schedules, with the costs of a 9-to-5 school day within the bounds of current allotments of federal funding. While most schools will need increased funding—and flexibility—to expand school schedules, the authors found several federal funding sources that currently support efforts to redesign the school day, reform the calendar year, rethink professional development, or improve access to quality after-school programs. For instance, as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, schools receiving grants under Title I, Part A could use these funds to lengthen the school day. More than 56,000 public schools currently receive grants through Title I, Part A,³⁵ but few schools are using these funds to improve school schedules. ESSA also contains other funding streams for longer school days, including through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, and the newly authorized Promise Neighborhoods and Full-Service Community Schools programs under Title IV.

As part of their research, the authors also found that the cost for a 9-to-5 school day is somewhere around \$4 to \$5 per student per hour, though often much higher, depending on staffing and other factors.³⁶ So if a school has around 500 students—which is the average size of an elementary school—then the costs would be around \$2,000 to \$2,500 per additional hour.³⁷ This is about the size of Title I grants for many schools, and it means that schools could pay for the reforms using federal dollars.

Health policies and weather-related closures foist additional, unexpected days off onto working parents. Every child gets sick unexpectedly. On average, students miss around three days of school due to illness³⁸ per year, and 15 percent of students report missing more than a week of class.³⁹ But some districts have a take-no-prisoners approach when a child falls ill at school. In Duval County, Florida, for instance, parents are expected to pick up their child from school within 60 minutes of when they are notified.⁴⁰

Many schools also forbid students from attending school if they are found with nits, which are the eggs that form lice. Yet many organizations have argued that nits are not contagious enough to require a student to go home.⁴¹

Inclement weather is another source of unexpected school closings. While student safety should always be of top priority, school districts should ensure that their decisions on weather-related closings and delays are aligned with major employers in the area and local government offices, which often is not the case.

While these findings may seem obvious to anyone who has attended school or parented a school-age child, they have been accepted as the normal way that schools do business by parents, voters, and society. The typical school day and year comes nowhere close to aligning with the work schedules of most parents. These shortened, rigid, and unpredictable school schedules not only affect parents' day-to-day workloads, but they also reduce valuable learning time in the classroom, which negatively affects student achievement.⁴²

To improve the lives of working families and boost student outcomes, CAP recommends policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels to align school and work schedules. These policy solutions should extend the length of the school day, reduce the number of school closures, reform the calendar year, and rethink engagement strategies.

The federal government should take the following steps:

- **Foster innovative approaches to aligning school and work schedules and supporting working parents.** The president should use his convening power to host a White House conference on supporting working families through improved school schedules, and the convening should bring together diverse

stakeholders to solve these problems. The U.S. Department of Education should build on this work by creating and supporting a working group of school, district, and major community-based organization leaders who are committed to working on this issue and sharing best practices.

Through guidance—and future legislation—the federal government should also send a clear message that districts ought to align the schedules of schools with the typical work schedule more closely, and they ought to prioritize schools serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds in ways that improve student outcomes.

- **Promote the use of Title I, Part A dollars for expanded school schedules, and increase other federal funding sources for a 9-to-5 school day.** Title I, Part A funds carry a fair amount of flexibility, as school districts can use the funds “for any activity that supports the needs of students in the school.”⁴³ In other words, high-poverty schools can use funds from Title I, Part A to pay for 9-to-5 schools as part of a larger effort to boost achievement.

Congress should also appropriate additional funds for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program,⁴⁴ Promise Neighborhoods,⁴⁵ AmeriCorps⁴⁶ and the Full-Service Community Schools Program,⁴⁷ as well as other federal funds that support schools and communities by providing wrap-around services, after-school activities, and longer school days.

- **Create a pilot program that supports a 9-to-5 approach to schooling.** The federal government plays a key role in promoting innovation, and CAP recommends that a new competitive grant program be included in the Higher Education Act,⁴⁸ which is due for reauthorization. This new program would encourage graduate schools in social work to partner with neighboring public school districts in developing a 9-to-5 school schedule.

These sorts of university-school partnerships have already shown success within the community schools space, particularly in the “university-assisted community model.”⁴⁹ In this model, undergraduate and graduate students help lead the expanded-day programs, and faculty members use their expertise to contribute to strategic planning, fundraising, and curriculum development.

States should take the following steps:

- **Promote the 9-to-5 school day and compensate teachers who want to work longer hours.** While teachers should not have to work longer hours without additional compensation, states should support more schools that align with typical work schedules. Just as states create and support schools specializing in bilingualism, technology, the health professions, and more, states should also support the development of a “9-to-5 school,” a new theme-based option for parents. These efforts should be funded at the state level and become part of a district’s portfolio of schooling options.

This should be done through a competitive grant program that is targeted at low-income schools. In states with statewide salary schedules, states could create policies that would allow schools to compensate teachers with additional pay for a 9-to-5 school day.

- **Rethink their requirements on instructional time.** Current state guidelines on instructional time are outdated. In some states, no requirements on the length of the school day even exist.⁵⁰ States should increase the minimum number of hours that students are required to be in school. If states raised the minimum length of a school day to eight hours, for instance, this policy change would naturally lead to school schedules more aligned with the typical workday. This change would also allow more time for physical education, recess, enrichment, and electives.

Districts and schools should take the following steps, among others:

- **Offer family-centered schools.** Districts should introduce a new school model of choice called family-centered schools into their portfolios. These schools would organize themselves explicitly to support working families by limiting the days when school is closed to only major national holidays; offering an 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily schedule; reinventing parent-teacher communication to eliminate parent-teacher conferences at school during the day and allow for more calls, texts, and other one-off, technology-enabled solutions; adopting more parent-friendly health policies; and more.

Districts should prioritize providing access to these schools to low-income families and where there is great need. In low-income schools, the district can cover the additional costs through Title I, Part A under the Schoolwide Program.

- **Conduct a comprehensive parent needs assessment.** Districts should consult parents in the planning and implementation of their family-centered school schedules. Parent consultation and family needs assessments are paramount to ensuring that new schedules both align with the standard workday and satisfy the needs of local parents. District administrators should also make sure that their outreach is inclusive of households with different income levels and family structures.
- **Create—and fund—new schedules in creative ways.** While CAP recommends a systemic approach to redesigning the school day and reforming the calendar year, districts can consider simpler, less-expensive alternatives for meeting the needs of working parents. For example, schools could enlarge the size of certain classes or create experiences for larger groups of students on certain days. Districts could also solicit AmeriCorps members, college students, and community members to facilitate programs during closings or at the end of the school day. They could also proactively send out information about teachers, aides, or other school personnel—known collectively as “sub pools”—who are willing to supervise students for compensation on days off.
- **Leverage community resources and partner with community-based entities.** Schools should work with community providers in operating before- and after-school programs on school grounds rather than at facilities located outside the school building. Schools need to break down barriers and make it easier for outside organizations to use the school facilities. In addition, more effective and seamless communication between schools and after-school programs can help align after-school programming with the school day. Such measures would provide better accommodations for low-income families. Under ESSA, Title I-eligible schools may use Title I funds for these purposes.⁵¹
- **Redefine how professional development is delivered.** Districts should stop the practice of full-day school closures for professional development. Instead, they should utilize high-quality professional development strategies that can be embedded throughout the school day, including teacher collaboration and planning time, individualized coaching, classroom observations, evaluations from outside experts, and trainings on data analysis. Districts could also run citywide leadership development events during nonschool hours. They could also explore the use of online platforms, such as Knowledge Delivery Systems,⁵² for professional development and professional learning among educators, which would reduce the need for full-day closures for these purposes.

- **Better accommodate disadvantaged families and support increased parental involvement.** Schools should better respond to the needs of low-income, single-parent, or otherwise disadvantaged family households. First, schools should make every effort to accommodate parents' work schedules when scheduling parent-teacher conferences, student work expos, or similar events. For instance, schools could provide alternative parent outreach options such as virtual conferences or regular emails and phone calls.

Administrators should take the following steps:

- **Negotiate more efficient bus schedules.** Many school districts follow a multitiered busing schedule system in order to save on transportation costs.⁵³ For example, a single bus can run three routes in one morning instead of three buses running one route each. As a consequence, however, elementary, middle, and high schools start and end their days at significantly different times. Administrators should work with transportation companies to identify alternatives to tiered busing schedules, such as dual-route systems, that would enable all grade levels to follow the same full-time school schedule without significantly increasing costs.
- **Leverage technology to communicate with parents and better target days off.** Districts should offer parent-teacher conferences via an online platform such as Skype or replace formal parent-teacher conferences with regular phone calls and emails. A number of technologies, such as Edmodo, have made it easier for educators to share information with parents, and while some advocates have expressed privacy concerns, more schools should take advantage of these potential solutions.⁵⁴ Districts could also explore the use of online platforms, such as Knowledge Delivery Systems,⁵⁵ for professional development and professional learning among educators, which would reduce the need for full-day closures for these purposes.
- **Align school year calendars and take cues from major employers about emergency closings.** Schools within an area should closely align their calendars and scheduling policies. Local officials could bring together school administrators and ask them to work together to devise a unified school schedule. Alternatively, charter and independent schools could align their calendars with the largest public school system in the area. School administrators should also take cues on local emergencies and weather-related closings from major employers in the area.

Background

The modern-day school calendar is operating under the needs of the 19th century, a time when most children lived on farms and industrialization was only beginning to emerge. In the early 1800s, no standard school schedule existed, and the rules governing a school calendar year were tied to the economic needs of the local community.

While there is some disagreement in the literature on the exact origins of the school calendar, recent research suggests that rural and urban schools operated on different calendars. In rural areas, children attended school in two brief terms—summer and winter—since these seasons were nonharvesting periods and children were not needed in the fields.⁵⁶ In urban areas, students received year-round calendars with a short break during the summer.

During the late 19th century, some stakeholders pushed for a standardization of the school system. Specifically, they aimed to end the significant variation of school schedules across different towns and cities. While urban school systems agreed to shorten their calendar years, rural areas agreed to lengthen them, laying the foundation of the current 180-day school year.⁵⁷

In both urban and rural areas, however, children were expected to leave school in the early afternoon so they could work in order to help support their families.⁵⁸ After-school programs did not emerge until the turn of the 20th century, when there was a corresponding rise in state laws restricting child labor and mandating formal school enrollment.⁵⁹ As a consequence, many school-age children were left unsupervised after school, which gave way to a rising concern about the potential dangers for unsupervised children, so-called latchkey kids.⁶⁰

Over the next few decades, from the early 1920s to the 1950s, more sophisticated after-school programs arose. However, local community organizations of varying types primarily staffed these programs and did not provide any formal system of services. Starting in the 1960s, a number of organizations placed greater emphasis

on serving low-income students. By the 1990s, school-based after-school programs focused more on providing academic assistance and enrichment, particularly for underachieving and low-income students.⁶¹

Although after-school programs have grown much more sophisticated over time, several challenges remain. For one, many programs are simply unaffordable for working families. On average, parents spend about \$114 per week on after-school care, which translates to \$4,674 annually.⁶² And among low-income parents, 56 percent report the high cost of after-school programs as the reason for not enrolling their children in such programs.⁶³

In addition to cost, there is the issue of access. Demand exceeds participation in many after-school programs: Parents of nearly 20 million children report that they would enroll their child in an after-school program if one were available.⁶⁴ Moreover, due to lack of funding and other reasons, program quality remains an issue.⁶⁵

A nation's changing demographics

The “Mad Men” era of mid-20th century America has been over for decades. Today, only about 20 percent of U.S. families reflect the 1950s portrait of the working father and stay-at-home mother.⁶⁶ In the past 60 years, maternal employment has skyrocketed; today, in nearly 60 percent of married-couple families, both the husband and wife are in the labor force.⁶⁷

At the same time, single parents have more than tripled their share of American households since 1960.⁶⁸ There are more than 8 million single mothers in the United States, and more than 6 million of them are employed.⁶⁹ In fact, 67 percent of women with children under age 6 are employed.⁷⁰

In most communities, the desire to work is not just a matter of preference but also a matter of financial necessity.⁷¹ In New York City, for instance, the basic family budget for a two-parent, two-child household can be as much as \$94,000 per year.⁷² Since the early 2000s, living expenses for middle-class families have risen steadily, while incomes have been stagnant or declining.⁷³ In other words, few families are able to afford to live comfortably on one partner's income.

For most families, vacation time too is limited. The average American worker receives just 6 paid holidays and 10 paid vacation days, for a total of 16 paid days off per year.⁷⁴

The reality of work for low-income families

While the demands of work and parenting affect all family households, the situation is more dire for single parents and low-wage workers. For instance, about 29 percent of part-time working mothers are also single parents.⁷⁵ And while a full-time minimum wage worker earns about \$15,000 annually, he or she would need to make more as a single parent. Specifically, he or she would need to make at least \$35,000 per year to support one child adequately.⁷⁶

Less-than-full-time school schedules—schedules that do not mirror the 9-to-5 workday—also place an especially heavy burden on low-income families. Low-income families are less likely to have flexible jobs and more likely to have jobs with fewer benefits, which means they have a harder time juggling work-life priorities.⁷⁷

Many lower-income workers also have little control over their schedules. In Washington, D.C., for instance, 36 percent of retail and service workers report having unstable work schedules, which means their schedules may change each week due to changes in shifts or demand.⁷⁸ This instability in the District of Columbia—and the rest of the nation—makes meeting the competing demands of work and family even more difficult. It's also difficult to find after-school or daily child care programs that allow parents to simply drop off their children when needed.

The middle-class squeeze

There is no question that single parents and low-income working parents are burdened disproportionately because of the misalignment between school and work schedules. But middle-income families are caught in the school vs. work schedule trap as well. Between 1979 and 2006, for instance, the typical middle-class family's workweek increased by 11 hours.⁷⁹ This increase in working hours among middle-income families is partly due to the rise in mothers joining the workforce and occupying professional and managerial positions.⁸⁰ Since the Great Recession, an increasing number of mothers have also become the primary breadwinners in their families.⁸¹

At the same time, middle-income families are facing an increasingly uncertain future. The cost of maintaining a middle-class lifestyle for married-couple families has increased by more than \$10,000 over the past decade.⁸² Many middle-income families also live farther away from close relatives and will have less of a support system to rely on when the inevitable child care emergency arises.⁸³

Women bear more of the cost of misaligned schedules than men

Finally, it bears mentioning that women disproportionately absorb the cost of misaligned school schedules. Since women typically earn less money than men, it often makes economic sense among families for mothers—not fathers—to take part-time jobs to allow them greater flexibility to care for their children after school. In fact, only about 53 percent of mothers whose youngest child is in elementary school work full time, compared with 84 percent of fathers who have children in elementary school and work full time.⁸⁴

Misaligned schedules hit women with elementary-school-age children particularly hard. These mothers have greater caregiving responsibilities than mothers of older school-age children and are thus less likely to work full time or participate in the labor force. Just 53 percent of women whose youngest child is in elementary school work full time, compared with the 60 percent of women whose youngest child is in middle school or high school who work full time.⁸⁵

CAP researchers found no similar trend among fathers. In fact, researchers found that fathers with younger school-age children were more likely to be working full time than fathers with older school-age children, but only slightly.⁸⁶ These findings suggest that women disproportionately bear the cost of misaligned school schedules, particularly women with elementary-school-age children.

This decision—to work full time or not—is personal, of course. Many women prefer to spend more time with their children. However, the prevalence of women in part-time jobs exacerbates the gender wage gap. Nonparticipation in the labor force also limits women’s ability to thrive professionally over the long term.⁸⁷ It also seems highly likely that far more women would work full time if schools were to operate on a 9-to-5 schedule that mirrored the typical workday.

Findings

Throughout the school year, schools are closed for 29 days, more than two workweeks longer than the average private-sector worker has in paid vacation and holidays.

CAP's research shows that the largest districts shut their doors for an average of 29 days each school year.⁸⁸ Some large school districts are closed even longer. For example, in the New York City district, schools are closed for 33 days each school year. Some districts, such as Los Angeles, are closed for more than 34 days during the school year. Note that these figures exclude weekends and summer vacation.

It is important to note that the authors included federal holidays—such as Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day—in their final count of school closings. While all districts close for federal holidays, there is significant variability in districts' responses to these holidays. For instance, Baltimore County Public Schools in Maryland closes on Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday, but Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District in Texas shuts down for the entire week.⁸⁹ During Christmas and New Year's, some districts will close for 10 consecutive school days, while others will close for eight or fewer. In addition, not all districts close for certain national and religious holidays, such as Columbus Day and Rosh Hashanah.

CAP researchers used an average of school closings from the largest school districts and compared the data against the work schedule of the average private-sector worker with paid leave benefits, who typically receives 10 days in paid vacation time and 6 paid holidays per year.⁹⁰ When CAP researchers performed this analysis, they found that schools are closed 80 percent longer—or about 13 more days—than the typical worker receives in paid holidays and vacation time.

This analysis is conservative because it does not address summer vacation, which in most districts ranges from 49 days to 60 days off.⁹¹ When CAP researchers include summer vacation days in the analysis, they find that schools are closed for as many as 67 more days than the typical American worker receives in paid vacation time. In short, working families often have to look for alternative means of child care for large swaths of the year.

What's more, many workers do not get paid time off. For instance, nearly one-quarter of all part-time workers, or about 7 million workers, have school-age children, and they too must find a way to care for their children during days when school is closed.⁹³ Nine percent of full-time workers also have no access to paid vacation time.⁹⁴ And 21 percent of workers are contract or temp workers with very limited access to paid leave.⁹⁵

If the sheer number of days of school closures were not problematic enough, the reasons for some school closings are questionable at best. For example, most school districts in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, close their schools on the opening day of deer hunting season.⁹⁶ A victory parade for the Royals, winners of the 2015 World Series, was the reason that the schools in Kansas City, Missouri, closed for the day.⁹⁷ Similarly, the Philadelphia schools closed for Pope Francis' 2015 visit to the city—in all, the schools were shut down for four entire days.⁹⁸ This was not standard across all cities hosting the papal visit, however. When Pope Francis visited New York City, for instance, public schools remained open.⁹⁹

In other cases, schools select numerous and consecutive days off at predictably inconvenient times for working parents. One charter school in Washington, D.C., that serves a mostly low-income student population closes for the entire week of Thanksgiving, as well as the Monday following the holiday. Other District of Columbia charter schools extend their winter and spring breaks to the Monday following the break, opening on the following Tuesday.¹⁰⁰

Consider one of the common reasons for school closings—professional development. In Charlotte, North Carolina, students miss about eight full school days for staff development.¹⁰¹ The Miami-Dade school district in Florida holds seven full-day closures throughout the year for this reason. Some districts also regularly dismiss students early—some schools as early as 1:00 p.m.—in order to provide additional staff development time. For instance, elementary school students in Los Angeles receive 26 shortened school days due to the district's "banked time" for professional development.¹⁰²

“My son only had four full weeks of school from the beginning of the school year in September until Thanksgiving.”

– Nancy Vanasek, parent of two elementary school students in the greater New York area⁹²

While high-quality professional development and collaboration are critical for enabling teachers to improve their practice, no other major profession—such as law, medicine, or engineering—shuts its doors for professional development. In short, schools should build this time into their schedules through differentiated staffing schedules or other solutions that do not come at the expense of parents and students.

While hard to quantify, navigating these school closures places an undue amount of stress on parents. Many parents have to make quick, informal arrangements with a relative or friend to accommodate school closures. Others try to rearrange their work schedules. Even those who prefer a caregiver—and can afford one—still have to find someone who is readily available for a full day—no easy task.

Closing time

Districts are closed far more often than the typical workplace. CAP collected the data below directly from the largest school districts. The table displays the number of closings and early dismissals students received during the 2015-16 school year. The table is ranked by district size.

The total count of student nonattendance days includes national and religious holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Memorial Day, and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The authors recognize the historical and cultural significance of these holidays and do not mean to suggest that schools should remain open on these dates. Many of these holidays may also be non-workdays for students' parents. However, as the table below illustrates, districts have different approaches to student holidays, both federal and local.

TABLE 1
Closing time

School closings and early dismissals for students

School district	State	Number of student nonattendance days	Number of early releases
New York City	New York	33	2
Los Angeles Unified	California	32	26*
Chicago	Illinois	29	Not applicable
Miami-Dade County	Florida	31	5
Clark County	Nevada	27	Not applicable
Broward County	Florida	22	6
Houston Independent	Texas	23	5
Hillsborough County	Florida	28	37*
Orange County	Florida	28	6
Fairfax County	Virginia	28	6
Palm Beach County	Florida	29	5*
Gwinnett County	Georgia	28	10
Dallas	Texas	28	1
Wake County	North Carolina	29	6
Montgomery County	Maryland	26	6
Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	27	7
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	North Carolina	29	4
San Diego Unified	California	27	35*
Duval County	Florida	30	16
Prince George's County	Maryland	33	4
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent	Texas	26	Not applicable
Shelby County	Tennessee	30	4
Cobb County	Georgia	34	5
Baltimore County	Maryland	28	5

*Early releases are regularly scheduled dismissals at the elementary school grade level.

Sources: Authors' analysis of collected data from the largest U.S. public school districts, personal communication with district office staff, and materials from the National Council on Teacher Quality. See appendix for full sources list.

If families pay out of pocket for child care to cover the excess school closure days and hours, it would cost an average of \$6,600 per year, or 9 percent of an average family's income.

When CAP researchers estimated the cost of child care due to misaligned school and work schedules, they arrived at a cost of \$6,600 per year, on average. Since the median income for family households with school-age children is around \$70,000 per year, the estimated out-of-pocket costs are about 9 percent of a typical family's income.¹⁰³ But families in the lowest income quintile earn just \$29,000, and for them, paying \$6,600 for child care is simply out of reach. In fact, these out-of-pocket costs would assume more than one-fifth, or nearly 23 percent, of their household's income.¹⁰⁴

To calculate out-of-pocket costs, CAP researchers made a number of assumptions. For instance, the authors used the average hourly wage for child care workers of \$10.72 to estimate the cost of child care. The authors also assumed a commute time of 26 minutes when estimating the length of the workday. The authors also prorated the amount of a parent's paid time off over the length of the school year.

Note, too, that this analysis is providing a hypothetical, and the authors do not believe that most parents pay out of pocket for all of the additional child care that is required due to misaligned school and work schedules. Still, as Jenna Roberts, the mother of two elementary school students in the greater Boston area, noted: "It's like spit and glue trying to hold this all together."¹⁰⁵ For additional details on the assumptions—and for sources of the data—please see the detailed Methodology section.

The data vary by both location and family structure. Misaligned schedules may cost a household headed by a single mother as much as 20 percent of her income, for instance.¹⁰⁶ The costs are also higher for families in certain major urban areas. For the average family living in Philadelphia, for instance, costs could consume as much as 14 percent of a family's annual income.¹⁰⁷

The typical school day does not reflect normal work hours, and most schools close two hours or more before the end of the typical workday.

Most school districts in the country are closed by 3:30 p.m., according to CAP's analysis of a federal data set.¹⁰⁸ Most working parents, however, have jobs that end at 5:00 p.m.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, a preponderance of working parents and guardians

must find alternative ways to care for their children every business day. Those child care options include relying on everything from after-school programs to paid child care, family members, neighbors, or friends.¹¹⁰

Parents also get short shrift in the morning. Most districts start the day at 8:00 a.m., according to CAP's analysis of a federal survey.¹¹¹ This finding indicates that parents typically have to get their children up and out the door earlier to meet their job demands. Moreover, this early start to the day for students is earlier than cognitive science suggests is ideal for teenagers.¹¹²

But the above averages do not reveal the many districts that have even earlier opening and closing times. For example, the districts of Gwinnett County in Georgia and Duval County in Florida see students starting school as early as 7:00 a.m.¹¹³ In other districts, such as Montgomery and Baltimore counties in Maryland, schools end the day as early as 2:10 p.m. And in many districts, schools routinely close even earlier once per week—as early as 1:00 p.m.—in order to allot teachers additional time for professional development. These findings also overlook the millions of parents who send their child to half-day kindergarten, which lasts for only a few hours per day.¹¹⁴

The clear misalignment of school and work schedules hurts working families. Parents have to figure out alternative means of child care in the late afternoon. What's more, after-school programs are often managed separately from the general school day, as discussed below, which means that there is no systemic approach to support working parents.

The middle school mismatch

Among the largest school districts, the daily bell schedules of middle school show more variance than the schedules of other grade levels and underscore the difficulties faced by working parents who have to get their children to and from school—in some districts, as early as 7:05 a.m. for the opening bell and 2:05 p.m. for school dismissal.

TABLE 2

The middle school mismatch

The range of start and end times for middle schools

School district	State	School start time (a.m.)	School end time (p.m.)
New York City	New York	8:00 – 8:20	2:20 – 4:00
Los Angeles Unified	California	8:00	3:00
Chicago	Illinois	7:30 – 9:00	2:30 – 4:00
Miami-Dade County	Florida	8:35 – 9:10	3:05 – 3:50
Clark County	Nevada	7:05 – 8:20	2:11 – 3:20
Broward County	Florida	7:15 – 9:45	2:15 – 4:30
Houston Independent	Texas	7:30 – 8:20	3:00 – 4:00
Hillsborough County	Florida	7:35 – 9:15	2:50 – 4:15
Orange County	Florida	9:30	2:50
Fairfax County	Virginia	7:30	2:15
Palm Beach County	Florida	8:45 – 9:15	3:45 – 4:15
Gwinnett County	Georgia	9:20	4:00
Dallas	Texas	8:35	3:35
Wake County	North Carolina	7:30 – 8:15	2:20 – 3:15
Montgomery County	Maryland	8:15	3:00
Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	7:50 – 8:30	3:00 – 3:20
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	North Carolina	8:15 – 9:15	3:00 – 4:15
San Diego Unified	California	7:15 – 9:00	2:10 – 3:45
Duval County	Florida	9:30	4:15
Prince George's County	Maryland	7:45 – 9:30	2:25 – 4:10
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent	Texas	7:30 – 8:10	2:30 – 3:10
Shelby County	Tennessee	7:15 – 8:15	2:15 – 3:15
Cobb County	Georgia	9:15	4:15
Baltimore County	Maryland	7:10 – 9:00	2:25 – 3:55

Sources: Authors' analysis of collected data from the largest U.S. public school districts, personal communication with district office staff, and materials from the National Council on Teacher Quality. See appendix for full sources list.

The longest summer

Despite the fact that most parents have only a few weeks off each year, a lengthy summer break is the norm in most districts. The table below displays the length of the school year and summer recess among the largest school districts. The table is ranked by school district size.

TABLE 3
The longest summer

Length of school year and summer recess among the largest school districts, 2015-16 school year

School district	State	First day of school*	Last day of school**	Number of instructional days	Length of summer break, by weekdays***
New York City	New York	September 9	June 28	180	49
Los Angeles Unified	California	August 18	June 10	180	47
Chicago	Illinois	September 8	June 21	178	57
Miami-Dade County	Florida	August 24	June 9	180	54
Clark County	Nevada	August 24	June 1	180	57
Broward County	Florida	August 24	June 9	180	54
Houston Independent	Texas	August 24	May 25	175	65
Hillsborough County	Florida	August 25	June 10	181	54
Orange County	Florida	August 24	June 9	180	55
Fairfax County	Virginia	September 8	June 23	180	55
Palm Beach County	Florida	August 17	June 2	180	54
Gwinnett County	Georgia	August 10	May 25	180	55
Dallas	Texas	August 24	June 2	175	59
Wake County	North Carolina	August 24	June 9	180	54
Montgomery County	Maryland	August 31	June 17	184	53
Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	September 8	June 22	180	52
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	North Carolina	August 24	June 9	180	54
San Diego Unified	California	September 8	June 21	180	57
Duval County	Florida	August 24	June 10	180	53
Prince George's County	Maryland	August 25	June 14	180	53
Cypress-Fairbanks Independent	Texas	August 24	June 1	176	60
Shelby County	Tennessee	August 10	May 27	180	53
Cobb County	Georgia	August 31	May 25	180	50
Baltimore County	Maryland	August 24	June 17	190	48

*The date listed refers to the first instructional day that all grade-level students are in attendance. This does not include staggered start dates for certain grade levels.

**The date listed refers to the last day of student attendance on districts' calendars. This does not include staggered end dates for certain grade levels.

***The length of summer recess applies to the number of vacation days before the first instructional day in the 2015-16 school year.

Sources: Authors' analysis using collected data from the largest U.S. public school districts, personal communication with district office staff, and materials from the National Council on Teacher Quality. See appendix for full sources list.

What's more, when it comes to summer recess in some districts, not all students start classes or end them on the same day. Certain school districts, such as New York City and Philadelphia, follow a staggered school start and end schedule. More specifically, prekindergarten and kindergarten students start and end the school year on different dates than other grade levels.¹¹⁵ These staggered dates are also often early release days for younger students. While these staggered starts are intended to help younger students adjust to the new school environment,¹¹⁶ they also may create more confusion and inconvenience for working parents. Many children have already experienced preschool or pre-K by the time they enter kindergarten, begging the question of whether the staggered start is necessary.

It does not have to be this way. Child care centers, for instance, often offer much more expansive schedules. Many centers open early and stay open as late as 7:00 p.m., provide full meals and snacks for children, and use staggered shift schedules for staff to ensure that the hours are not unmanageable for workers. Child care centers are also less likely to close for staff development. In short, they are designed to meet the needs of working parents, unlike most public schools.¹¹⁷

Key school events such as parent-teacher conferences are usually scheduled during the day.

Many large, urban districts close schools for either a full day or have early dismissals for parent-teacher conferences.¹¹⁸ While these meetings are vital opportunities for parents to learn from and share with their child's teacher—and some working parents have to take off from work for several hours or a full day in order to attend—many of these face-to-face conferences last only 10 minutes for each individual family.¹¹⁹ For instance, the Dallas Independent School District closes its schools at least twice annually for parent-teacher conferences. Chicago Public Schools holds two full-day closings as well. Gwinnett County, Georgia, dismisses its elementary and middle school students early twice per year to allow for parent-teacher conferences. In Cobb County, Georgia, elementary and middle school students receive an entire week of early dismissals to accommodate these conferences.

In other cases, some districts hold no official policy on parent-teacher conferences and defer control to individual schools.¹²⁰ However, these districts do not provide explicit guidance on scheduling practices, and they typically do not discourage school closings for conference purposes. In other words, even if districts do not require closures for parent-teacher conferences, schools may still shut down for this purpose.

Most districts also conduct parent-teacher conferences during the hours most parents are at work. According to the 2014 American Time Use Survey, about 70 percent of parents report working between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.¹²¹ Although many parents also work night shifts and odd hours, the practice of daytime conferences forces parents to either take time away from their jobs to go to the school, which is not always nearby, or not attend at all.

To be clear, many schools and districts do hold some parent-teacher conferences during the evening. But the evening slots are limited and not standard policy among the districts that CAP researchers surveyed. For instance, in Shelby County, Tennessee, teachers are supposed to arrange parent-teacher conferences between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. But these limited hours do not provide parents much flexibility in selecting a meeting time that does not fall within their normal work schedule.

Even more frustrating for working parents, most schools do not provide meaningful accommodations to support parent participation in parent-teacher conferences and other engagement opportunities. Nationally, only 40 percent of schools help parents attend school events by offering transportation or child care.¹²² In Kentucky, this figure drops to 30 percent, and in other states, such as Montana, the percentage of schools that offer such services is as low as 19 percent.¹²³

This challenge is especially hard for working parents of children who require an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, or who require accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.¹²⁴ In accordance with regulations under these laws, parents are expected to attend multiple IEP or 504 team meetings each year. While IDEA requires schools to schedule these meetings at a convenient time for parents, schools may still limit the days and times they are willing to hold meetings. A disproportionate number of children with disabilities come from low-income backgrounds, making these constraints particularly harmful for economically disadvantaged families. Low-income parents have less flexibility to participate in these meetings, since it may increase the risk of losing their place of employment.¹²⁵

Some organizations, however, have taken positive steps to help ensure family engagement. The Washington, D.C.-based Flamboyant Foundation, for instance, works with educators to encourage more targeted approaches to family engagement.¹²⁶ The Flamboyant Foundation helped pioneer the practice of parent-teacher home visits in the District of Columbia. As part of the practice, teachers visit students' parents in the family home and seek to create meaningful relationships with them.¹²⁷

Misaligned school and work schedules cost the U.S. economy \$55 billion in lost productivity annually.

Poorly aligned school and work schedules do more than just create daily inconveniences for working parents. They also affect parents' productivity.

There are multiple ways to calculate lost productivity due to misaligned school and work schedules. An analysis could focus, for instance, on workers who have entered less demanding occupations in order to attend to their children's needs.

For this report, though, the authors focused on two specific drivers of lost productivity. One is what the authors have called the Stay-at-Home problem. The second is the I Don't Know How She Does It problem.

The authors examined both areas of lost productivity and will look at them in turn. First, the authors studied the Stay-at-Home issue, defined as the proportion of workers, largely women, who are working full time at lower rates than others. Specifically, the analysis looked at the difference between full-time employment rates of women with elementary-school-age children and those with secondary-school-age children. Researchers did not find a difference in the rate of women working part time who have elementary vs. secondary school children. So for the purposes of this calculation, CAP researchers assumed that the entire gap in full-time employment rates between mothers of elementary-school-age children and mothers of secondary-school-age children could be attributed to their caregiving responsibilities.

CAP researchers found that mothers whose youngest child was in elementary school had significantly lower full-time employment rates than mothers whose youngest child was in middle school or high school—53 percent and 60 percent, respectively. According to CAP's analysis, the gap in full-time employment rates between mothers of elementary-school-age children and mothers of middle- and high-school-age children suggests that more than 1 million fewer mothers of elementary-school-age children are working full time, forfeiting an annual median

wage of \$35,000. Mothers whose youngest child is in elementary school also are less likely to be actively looking for work. In fact, 27 percent of mothers whose youngest child is in elementary school are not in the labor force, compared with 23 percent of mothers whose youngest child is in middle school or high school.

Researchers then multiplied this gap in full-time employment rates by the total population of mothers whose youngest child is in elementary school, as well as by the median annual wage of mothers with children in elementary school, in order to estimate lost productivity. The resulting figure of \$35 billion per year is an estimate of the total productivity loss due to this gap in full-time employment rates.

The second area of lost productivity is what the authors have dubbed the I Don't Know How She Does It issue. This source of lost productivity comes from parents either leaving work or not coming to work on the intermittent days throughout the year when schools are closed. In order to estimate the adverse impact of these closings, CAP researchers multiplied the median hourly wage by the number of hours in school closings that exceed the average paid time off for full-time, private-sector workers with access to paid leave. The authors restricted their analysis to households where all adults are working so as not to include households where one parent is not working and is therefore available to take care of children when school is closed.

The authors also assumed that many families have child care when school is closed that does not require them to take time off from work. For instance, among families with working mothers, 17 percent of school-age children are regularly cared for by their grandparents, another 15 percent are regularly cared for by other relatives such as siblings, and another 3 percent are cared for by a nonrelative living in the home, according to research by Lynda Laughlin for the Bureau of the Census.¹²⁸ The authors assume that these options are also available on occasional days when schools are closed. Therefore, the authors included only 65 percent of households with employed parents in their analysis.

While the question of how to quantify lost productivity due to intermittent days off is difficult to answer precisely, the authors have reason to believe that their assumption may understate the scope of the problem. For one, there is the issue of paid leave. Because of methodological constraints, the authors assumed that all workers in their analysis receive the average number of paid leave days nationally. But the reality is far different, and millions of workers—particularly low-wage workers—have no access to paid leave, which means they face hard choices about how to care for their children during a closure.

And finally, there are many other instances throughout a school year when parents are expected to leave work to participate in a school activity: field trips, faculty celebrations, recitals, science fairs, and more.¹²⁹ These activities are largely voluntary and none are accounted for in the analysis, yet many parents leave work to attend.

In the end, the authors found that lost productivity costs were around \$20 billion annually for the I Don't Know How She Does It issue.

The authors then added this figure to the estimated \$35 billion in lost productivity due to the Stay-at-Home issue. This results in a total of about \$55 billion in lost productivity.

This \$55 billion figure is comparable to what the nation's economy loses due to workplace-related injuries and illnesses, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.¹³⁰ Lost productivity due to misaligned school and work schedules also would assume a sizable percentage of total federal spending on public education, which is approximately \$600 billion.¹³¹

Fewer than half of elementary schools and fewer than one-third of low-income schools offer before- and after-school care, and when offered it is often unaffordable.

While the authors believe that redesigned school schedules are the best solution for schools looking to implement 9-to-5 reforms, there are alternatives. Specifically, some schools might use after-school programs to address the gap between school and work schedules.

Still, only about 45 percent of all public elementary schools actually offer before- and after-school programs at their school, according to CAP's analysis of federal data.¹³² Across the United States, parents of nearly 20 million children are unable to enroll their child in an after-school program because one is not available to them.¹³³ In several states, in fact, only 15 percent of public schools offer school-based care. In Utah, this figure is as low as 3 percent.¹³⁴

Of the schools that do manage after-school programs, few ensure that the costs are progressively priced, and in this report's survey of the nation's largest districts, only seven districts, including Fairfax County in Virginia, made after-school programs affordable or completely free for low-income families.¹³⁵ The Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District in Texas, for example, offers school-based care with fees based on a family's eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch. The

district's standard cost for before- and after-school programs is \$288 per month, but parents who qualify for free lunch can pay a discounted fee of \$188 per month, and those who qualify for reduced lunch can pay \$218 per month. Even with these discounts, however, these monthly costs still add up to around \$2,250 to \$2,600 per year.

In sum, only one-third of the largest districts provide affordable care despite the fact that the costs of after-school programs are clearly out of reach for most low-income families. In many states, for instance, these costs are more than \$10,000 per year.¹³⁶

What's more, even the districts that provide after-school programs do not always make them easy to access, and for the most part, the programs are disconnected from the school system. In Montgomery County, Maryland, for instance, the county's parks and recreation department runs many of the after-school programs.¹³⁷ The case is similar in Clark County, Nevada, where it is the county's parks and recreation department that runs most of the programs. In Chicago, the district makes systemic information on after-school programs available only via a Freedom of Information Act request—clearly, not a very parent-friendly approach.¹³⁸

This hodgepodge of after-school policies presents numerous problems. For one, the lack of transparency, such as in Chicago, makes it difficult for parents to determine which schools have the best after-school programs. It also makes it harder for school systems to ensure that after-school programs are supporting students either socially—providing more time for play, for example—or academically—providing more time for learning.

The misalignment of school and work schedules has a disparate impact on black, Latino, and low-income working parents.

While unpredictable work schedules affect all workers, they disproportionately affect lower-income workers. For instance, 16 percent of hourly workers have unstable work schedules due to irregular, on-call, split, or rotating shift times, compared with 12 percent of salaried workers.¹³⁹ Blacks and Latinos also are more likely to work in hourly jobs that are less flexible than the salaried positions typically held by higher-earning workers.¹⁴⁰

Most low-income schools and districts currently receive funding that can be used to offer a 9-to-5 school day, with costs for a 9-to-5 school day within the bounds of current allotments of federal funding.

The Every Student Succeeds Act includes new changes and funding streams to support efforts in redesigning the school day, reforming the calendar year, rethinking professional development, or improving access to quality after-school programs.

For instance, Title I, Part A currently provides more than \$14 billion in funding to schools and districts with high numbers and concentrations of low-income students, and even districts with low concentrations of poverty get around at least \$1,000 per low-income student, on average.¹⁴¹ Funds from Title I, Part A can be used for targeted assistance purposes on Title I students alone or as part of a comprehensive schoolwide reform to raise achievement among the lowest-performing students.¹⁴²

Title I, Part A funds carry a fair amount of flexibility, and school districts can use the funds “for any activity that supports the needs of students in the school.”¹⁴³ In this regard, high-poverty schools can use funds from Title I, Part A to pay for 9-to-5 schools as part of a larger effort to boost achievement. Some schools participating in expanded learning time, or ELT, programs have already taken advantage of this provision. States are also now required to set at least 7 percent of their Title I funding aside for the School Improvement program.

To be clear, there was some confusion about how Title I, Part A funds could be used, at least until recently. But in 2015, the Department of Education clarified use of Title I, Part A. The guidance now states: “In general, after-school tutoring and extended-day activities to allow for extended time on tasks are allowable as long as they are meeting an identified need to improve student academic achievement.”¹⁴⁴

In addition, many states and districts receive additional resources that can be used to support a 9-to-5 school day. These funding sources include: the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program;¹⁴⁵ Promise Neighborhoods;¹⁴⁶ and the Full-Service Community Schools Program (see complete list in Table 7 below),¹⁴⁷ all of which exist under Title IV of ESSA and support schools and communities by providing wraparound services, after-school activities, volunteers, and longer school days.

At the same time, the authors also found that the cost for a 9-to-5 school day is somewhere around \$4 to \$5 per student per hour, though often much higher, depending on staffing and other factors.¹⁴⁸ So if a school has around 500 students—which is the average size of an elementary school—then the costs would be around \$2,000 to \$2,500 per additional hour.¹⁴⁹

This estimate comes from the ELT literature. Most recently, the National Center on Time & Learning profiled five ELT schools that were markedly diverse in terms of size, school demographics, and cost structures. Overall, the study “estimated the costs of implementing ELT to be between \$2.20 and \$5.23 per pupil per hour in districts that added between 132 and 540 hours to their school year.”¹⁵⁰

In an ELT redesign model that pays a school’s teachers to work during the extended hours, the average cost was around \$3 per student per hour. If the school decided to hire extra staff, such as tutors or coordinators, to supplement teaching personnel, costs would rise to about \$4 per student per hour.¹⁵¹

Massachusetts also funded a study in 2011 to look at the issue of ELT costs. The state caps funding for schoolwide ELT programs at \$1,300 per pupil, or about \$4.33 per pupil per hour, and the researchers found that this amount was sufficient for 80 percent of schools that rolled out ELT initiatives.¹⁵²

A follow-up to the Massachusetts study, conducted by one of the same researchers, found similar ranges using a more sophisticated costing-out technique that included marginal costs and adjustments for cost of living. In that analysis of five schools, costs varied widely, from \$981—or around \$3 per student per hour—to \$4,865, or around \$17 per student per hour.¹⁵³ Note that the researchers considered the \$4,865 figure to be an outlier; most of the schools clustered around \$2,000 per student, or \$6 per student per hour.

Finally, CAP released a report in 2008 that attempted to quantify the costs of ELT implementation.¹⁵⁴ However, the reported figures are pretty conservative and potentially outdated. Providing proportionately higher salaries to existing teachers would cost \$2 per pupil per hour, according to the study. A flat stipend approach would cost anywhere from \$1.50 to \$1.90 per pupil per hour, and hiring new certified teaching staff would cost \$3.33 per pupil per hour.

In short, many schools could use their federal dollars to cover the costs of a 9-to-5 school day.

Access to paid leave

As shown in the tables below, lower-income workers are also far less likely to receive paid vacation or paid leave benefits. For instance, just 48 percent of workers in the lowest 25th income percentile have paid vacation days, compared with 92 percent of workers in the highest 25th income percentile.

TABLE 4
Paid leave by income distribution

Income percentile*	Access to paid vacations	Access to paid sick leave	Access to paid personal leave	Access to paid family leave	Length of summer break, by weekdays***
Lowest 25 percent	48%	31%	16%	5%	49
Second-lowest 25 percent	84%	66%	39%	10%	47
Second-highest 25 percent	89%	73%	47%	14%	57
Highest 25 percent	92%	84%	58%	23%	54

*Surveyed occupations are classified into wage categories based on the average wage for the occupation, which may include workers with earnings both above and below the threshold. The categories were formed using percentile estimates generated by wage data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' "Occupational Employment Statistics" website for May 2015.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 32. Leave benefits: Access, private industry workers, National Compensation Survey, March 2015," available at <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2015/ownership/private/table32a.pdf> (last accessed May 2016).

Black and Latino workers are also less likely to have been with their current employers for more than four years, and tenure in a job translates into more paid time off. Fifty-seven percent of Hispanics and 54 percent of African Americans have been in their current job for four years or fewer, compared with 49 percent of white workers.¹⁵⁵ These workers of color are therefore less likely to be able to take paid time off for school-related reasons.

While schools that serve predominantly low-income students, black students, and Latino students are more likely to provide services to support parental involvement, given the additional barriers these parents face to attend these events, more could and should be done. Only 46 percent of low-income schools and 50 percent of majority-minority schools assist working parents in attending school events, such as parent-teacher conferences, with additional services such as child care and transportation.¹⁵⁶

This fact helps explain why disadvantaged families struggle to attend school-based events or events held during school hours. According to CAP's analysis of federal data, only 47 percent of low-income schools reported a high level of attendance at parent-teacher conferences, compared with 58 percent of nonpoor schools reporting high participation.¹⁵⁷ In fact, at nearly 28 percent of all low-income public schools, fewer than half of students' parents attended parent-teacher conferences.

The cost of after-school care

Across the nation, parents report spending about \$114 every week for their child's after-school program, which translates to about \$4,674 each school year.¹⁵⁸ Although some schools and districts provide free after-school care, parents by and large still bear the brunt of the costs associated with arranging care for their children during the school week. Tuition and fees make up far and away the greatest source of funding for after-school programs at 76 percent. Federal grants represent the next largest funding source at 11 percent.¹⁵⁹ Not only is this system of shifting the cost of after-school care to working parents unfair, but it's also highly regressive. In other words, lower-income families share a higher burden of the cost.

Minimum wage and lower-income workers earn significantly less—tens of thousands of dollars less—than workers in higher-earning positions.¹⁶⁰ On average, workers in clerical, sales, and service positions can earn as much as \$50,000 less annually than workers in business and finance occupations.¹⁶¹

This pay disparity also affects many workers of color. African American and Latino workers earn only a fraction of every dollar white and Asian workers make. Among full-time working women, for instance, blacks earn 81 cents to every \$1 whites earn and 67 cents to every \$1 Asians earn.¹⁶² Hispanic women or Latinas earn 75 percent as much as whites and 62 percent as much as Asians.¹⁶³ Even more, low-income schools are less likely to provide before- and after-school programs. Only 31 percent of low-income schools offer after-school care, compared with 40 percent of higher-income schools.¹⁶⁴

As shown in the tables below, the high costs of after-school care place a heavier burden on lower-income, African American, and Hispanic and Latino households.

TABLE 5
Cost of aftercare by household type

Income percentile	Family income, in U.S. dollars	Estimated share of income apportioned to aftercare
Bottom 20th percentile	\$25,000 to \$29,999	16 percent–19 percent
40th percentile	\$50,000 to \$54,999	8 percent–9 percent
60th percentile	\$80,000 to \$84,999	5 percent–6 percent
80th percentile	\$125,000 to \$129,999	4 percent
90th percentile	\$195,000 to \$199,999	2 percent

Note: CAP researchers also relied on estimates of annual afterschool costs from the Afterschool Alliance. The average weekly cost is \$114 per child per program, which translates to \$4,674 each school year.

Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015), available at https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032015/faminc/finc01_1.xls; Afterschool Alliance, "America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand" (2014), available at http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM_National_Report.pdf.

TABLE 6
Aftercare as a share of income, by household type

	Median family income, in U.S. dollars	Estimated share of income apportioned to aftercare
All races	\$66,632	7%
White	\$70,373	7%
Asian	\$83,049	6%
Black	\$43,364	11%
Hispanic	\$45,114	10%

Note: CAP researchers also relied on estimates of annual afterschool costs from the Afterschool Alliance. The average weekly cost is \$114 per child per program, which translates to \$4,674 each school year.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, 2015 Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015), available at https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032015/faminc/finc01_1.xls; Afterschool Alliance, "America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand" (2014), available at http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM_National_Report.pdf.

Research has shown the importance of after-school programs and extracurricular activities for social mobility among low-income youth.¹⁶⁵ However, the families in these communities have less money—and lower access—to affordable, high-quality care.

Health policies and weather-related closures foist additional, unexpected days off onto working parents.

Every child gets sick unexpectedly, sometimes for multiple days at a time. On average, students miss approximately three days of school each year due to illness,¹⁶⁶ and 15 percent of students report missing more than a week of class.¹⁶⁷ But dis-

tricts often have a take-no-prisoners approach when it comes to students falling ill. Once a child is considered too sick to be at school, many parents have no choice but to act quickly. In Duval County, Florida, parents are expected to pick up their sick child from school within 60 minutes of being notified.¹⁶⁸

Public schools in Washington, D.C., also have a strict policy prohibiting school nurses from administering over-the-counter medicine in cases of injury-related pain—for example, a child experiencing discomfort from a recent surgery or medical procedure, such as a broken bone in a cast.¹⁶⁹ Instead, schools require a physician's signature before they allow a registered nurse to administer Advil or even Tylenol. Without this completed form, parents must either designate another individual to administer the medication on their behalf or be forced to leave their workplace, arrive at the school, and administer the medicine themselves.¹⁷⁰

Lice policies are another example of rule rigidity. The so-called no-nit policy implemented in many schools forbids any student from attending school if they are found with nits, which are the eggs that form lice. Yet many prominent organizations have released statements that lice and nits are not contagious enough to require a student to go home.¹⁷¹

There are undoubtedly good reasons for these sorts of policies. Sick children attending school can lead to the spread of an illness. At the same time, however, schools should use common sense, and their policies should be more inclusive of working parents. Moreover, nearly 40 percent of working parents do not have paid parental leave or paid sick days that would allow them to take care of their children when they get sick.¹⁷²

Inclement weather conditions are another source of unexpected school closings. While student safety should always be of top priority, district officials should ensure their weather-related closing decisions are aligned with other major employers and government agencies in the area. It is not uncommon for schools to shut down during a storm, while parents are still expected to go to work. After the historic 2016 blizzard in Washington, D.C., for instance, schools were still closed the day after the storm ended, but many employers expected their staff to return to work.¹⁷³

Add to this issue the fact that many families depend on the meals offered by schools to augment the nutrition of their children. More than 15 million children in the United States live in a food-insecure household.¹⁷⁴ In other words, one out of every five children does not have consistent, adequate access to meals at home. Many parents, particularly low-income parents, rely on schools to provide their children with breakfast, lunches, or snacks throughout the regular school week.

As noted earlier in this report, public schools are closed for nearly 30 percent of weekdays each year, and as a consequence, many families may experience food insecurity for days or even weeks at a time.¹⁷⁵ Not only do school closings intensify the food insecurity of many working families, but they may also aggravate instances of child hunger.

Discussion: Placing findings in their policy context

To any parent who has rushed a teen out of bed in the wee hours of the morning to make a 7:00 a.m. school start time, these findings come as no surprise. Nor do these findings shock mothers, fathers, or guardians who have taken their children with them to work when school was closed for a professional development day. School schedules rely on the outdated assumption that one parent is immediately available to attend to their child in case of a school closing, delay, or emergency.

Parents have long struggled with these misaligned school policies and, in some cases, have even lost jobs because of them. Take Fikirte Atlaw, who was left to raise a young son when her husband passed away.¹⁷⁶ As a working mother, she was able to make ends meet with her managerial position at a parking management company. But the widowed mother still struggled to find affordable child care for her son. Atlaw asked the parking management firm if she could shift her usual schedule and arrive at work an hour later so she could take her son to school in the morning.

Initially, the company tried to accommodate Atlaw's request and moved her work start time by an hour. Months later, however, she was fired from her position. She just could not find a way to meet her competing demands as a mother and manager. The misalignment between school and work schedules left this working mother out to dry.

Policy origins of misaligned school schedules

At first glance, schools would seem entirely to blame for the tone-deaf scheduling systems and policies that frustrate so many working parents, but schools do not operate in a vacuum. At the state and local levels, there are significant policy pressures to maintain the status quo and that keep educators from doing more to mitigate the issue.

In other words, even if schools wanted to change their opening times to better fit working families, many would find it hard to do so.

For the most part, states play the biggest policy role when it comes to this issue. As the unit of government ultimately responsible for education, states typically set a minimum number of instructional hours and days that students are required to be in school. Many of these laws have been left unchanged for decades and reflect an antiquated culture.¹⁷⁷

In states that require kindergarten, for example, states typically require only a few hours of kindergarten each day.¹⁷⁸ This is bad policy, particularly since most education experts believe that most children benefit from full-day kindergarten.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, a short school day places additional burdens on families, who often have to arrange care both before and after the kindergarten program.¹⁸⁰

States also set the minimum length of the school year, which is typically 180 days.¹⁸¹ In some states, however, policies on instructional time have not been updated in decades or do not reflect recent changes in family structure or today's workplace norms. And other states have simply set low expectations. For example, Minnesota set no minimum for instructional time until 2009, and its current 165-day requirement is significantly lower than the traditional 180 days mandated in other states.¹⁸²

In some instances, states also seem to establish scheduling policies based on special interests. For instance, some states prohibit public schools from starting the school year before Labor Day or ending it after Memorial Day because it ensures that students and their families spend more time and money boosting the state's tourism industry.¹⁸³ Indeed, state tourism groups have successfully lobbied in some areas for a longer summer break in order to generate more revenue for the theme park industry. For example, Kings Dominion, a local amusement park in Virginia, donated more than \$200,000 in campaign funding to political candidates and political action committees, in hopes that a 1986 state law would remain intact. Known as the Kings Dominion Law, the statute prohibits school districts from setting the first day of school before Labor Day.¹⁸⁴

Fiscal drivers

When it comes to school schedules, money again plays an important role, as the length of the school day is a key driver of education costs. Schooling is a people-intensive activity, and more than 80 percent of school budgets are wrapped up in costs associated with staff.¹⁸⁵

As a result, changes in state budgets can have a significant impact on school schedules. Today, hundreds of school districts—particularly those located in rural communities—now operate on a four-day school week simply to meet budget constraints.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, many school districts have actually shortened the school day or year to save money but in the process have made things tougher on parents. Some districts in Michigan, for instance, have reduced the minimum number of instructional days from 180 days to 170 days or fewer.¹⁸⁷

Likewise, an important fiscal issue is transportation, which is another large cost area for schools and districts. “Time is money, and this is particularly true of transportation costs,” says a 2015 Montgomery County Public Schools analysis of bell time options.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, some school districts cite transportation costs as the reason for the variation in schedules across grade levels.¹⁸⁹ Specifically, districts will use buses in waves—that is to say, first transporting students to high schools and then using the same buses to take students to middle schools and next to elementary schools—in order to minimize costs.

In 2014, for instance, the Montgomery County school board considered pushing back its school start times. But the proposal to push the high school start time later to 8:15 a.m., while retaining a four-tier bus schedule, would have cost the district \$21 million per year.¹⁹⁰

In this context, many districts find it difficult to make school schedules more accommodating of parents because such reforms are expensive. For instance, it costs one low-income school in Charleston, South Carolina, more than \$300,000 per year to extend the school day—a cost that the school largely covers through external donations and grants.¹⁹¹

Teacher preferences

The shorter school year and day is also a crucial benefit to teachers working in schools. For instance, the longer summer break allows many educators to participate in professional development and other school-related activities, which prepare them for the upcoming school year.¹⁹² Others prefer to take a second job during the summer to supplement their income.

Moreover, many teachers are themselves parents. By some estimates, more than half of teachers either have children or plan on having them someday,¹⁹³ and they often take jobs in education in order to attend to the needs of their own children.

It is therefore no surprise that in most collective bargaining agreements among teachers, the length of the workday is a mandatory subject of negotiation. And in the midst of recent education budget crises, many teachers unions push for shorter school weeks to reduce the overall number of teacher layoffs and pay cuts. In 2009, for example, the Hawaii State Teachers Association agreed to a 163-day school year and a 4-day workweek in order to ensure that each teacher kept his or her job.¹⁹⁴

It is possible, though, to restructure teacher schedules and lengthen the school day without requiring individual teachers to work longer hours without additional compensation. However, doing so would require a culture shift and creative thinking on the part of district and school leaders.

Disparate impact of school schedules on disadvantaged families

Misaligned school schedules have a disparate impact on low-income families, and the reasons are pretty easy to identify. For one, low-wage jobs typically have inflexible and unpredictable schedules. Nearly half of service-sector employees receive their work schedules less than a week in advance.¹⁹⁵ Workers in the retail and restaurant industries have it even worse, and one-third report not receiving any notice of a schedule change until the night before they have to work.¹⁹⁶

There's another issue: Lower-income parents receive fewer benefits and often cannot afford to take paid time off if their child is sick or has an otherwise unexpected day off.¹⁹⁷ This lack of flexibility makes it harder on the parent to arrange

adequate child care. It also helps explain why low-income parents are less likely to attend school activities such as back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and parent education workshops, since these activities require parents to take time off.¹⁹⁸

Because many low-income families live from paycheck to paycheck, they often have difficulty covering any sudden additional household costs.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, in most cases, they cannot afford after-school programming. In fact, 60 percent of low-income parents report not enrolling their children in after-school programs because of the expense.²⁰⁰

Financial insecurity has only grown worse for low-income families in recent decades. For example, the earnings gap between low-income families and wealthier households has grown by almost 10 percent in recent years, according to one recent study.²⁰¹

There's another cruel irony here: While low-income schools have the most to gain in terms of extending school schedules, they often have the least amount of money to cover these costs. In most areas, low-income schools typically receive less money to work with than schools in more affluent districts.²⁰²

Families with nonstandard work schedules

This report aims to examine a specific problem affecting working families—the misalignment of school scheduling policies. As noted earlier in this report, 70 percent of working adults report working between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Yet most schools operate on an 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. schedule, and they are closed for 30 percent of weekdays each year.

However, aligning the school day with the typical workday will not accommodate all parents' schedules. Neither will it solve the frustrations of all working families. Thirty percent of working adults are at work during the early morning or late evening hours, according to the 2014 American Time Use Survey. In other words, millions of working parents must find a way to balance their work-family life with irregular, nonstandard job schedules.

Low-wage workers disproportionately work jobs with odd hours and unpredictable shifts. African Americans, workers with less formal education, and working single mothers are also more likely to have nonstandard and erratic work schedules.²⁰³ Schools should better address the needs of these families. If schools and districts determine that parents in their community are more adversely affected by nonstandard schedules or low levels of employment, they should respond accordingly.

One school in Forsyth County, North Carolina, for example, is rethinking parent engagement through what it terms a “parental involvement mobile unit.” The bus, completely equipped with high-tech computers, meets families where they are and provides services that are traditionally based in a school building. Community volunteers operate the bus before school, after school, and on weekends, offering parent meetings, GED classes, and even child care.²⁰⁴

Schools and districts may also consider providing additional supports for parents who may work late-night shifts and are unable to be home when their child returns from school. Other potential solutions include providing school-based adult literacy and GED programs, computer lab centers, and a social services center to help eligible families apply for public benefits.

Hillsborough County, Florida

As part of this report, CAP researchers decided to dig deep into Hillsborough County, Florida, to understand how much school schedules may vary across schools within a single district. While these results may not be representative, they echo what was found across districts: From vacation days to start times, school schedules are a mishmash of poorly aligned times and dates.

In Hillsborough County, there are at least 12 different school calendars and schedules in operation. Hillsborough County elementary schools start anywhere from 7:45 a.m. to 8:20 a.m., middle schools start anywhere from 7:35 a.m. to 9:15 a.m., and high schools start at around 7:30 a.m.²⁰⁵

Meanwhile, there are almost 140 charter and independent schools within 32 miles of each other that are not required to follow the public school calendar. For example, Winthrop Charter School is an elementary school that runs classes from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., whereas most traditional public elementary schools start at 8:00 a.m. and end at 2:15 p.m.

These variations are not just limited to start and end times, however. These school systems also have different closings throughout the year, including days off for professional development and even holidays. Veterans Day, for example, is not a day off in traditional public schools but is a day off at certain charter schools. Also, more than one charter school has a different spring break than the district, which can result in families having to take two different weeks off in order to care for their children. What's more, one charter school ends the school year a full week before Hillsborough County's traditional public schools close.

One family with children in both a public school and a charter school such as Excel Academy would have to take up to 36 days off throughout the year in order to accommodate the differences between the schools, excluding summer break. When CAP researchers added in days when schools dismiss students early, they found that a parent would have to take up to 48 days off in order to accommodate these differences.²⁰⁶

A closer look at before- and after-school programs

The percentage of schools offering after-school programs has steadily increased over the past decade. Part of the reason has been a large boost in federal money. Funding for after-school programs has increased from \$40 million in 1998 to about \$1.15 billion today, due in part to the dedicated efforts of the Clinton administration.²⁰⁷

In spite of these efforts, such programs are still inaccessible for many parents. As noted in the report's findings section, high-poverty and majority-minority schools are less likely to offer before- and after-school options. But even if programs are available—either through schools or private organizations—availability does not always indicate high quality. Although there are outstanding examples of high-quality programs that are making a big difference for students,²⁰⁸ there remains a huge shortage of high-quality, federally funded programs.

Many after-school programs, particularly those that serve low-income children, face challenges in securing adequate staffing, financing, and program facilities.²⁰⁹ Another issue is that a diffuse group of providers runs after-school programs. In many cases, the after-school program is entirely disconnected from the school in both its operations and its learning objectives. This means that parents also have to work harder to enroll their students in the programs due to logistical barriers.²¹⁰ Parents also need to arrange transportation if care occurs at different locations, which presents a significant barrier for many.²¹¹ Working parents need care for their children, so in some cases, low-quality programs endure.

Recent reforms

Over the past decade, some schools have tried to do more to support working parents. They have pursued a variety of strategies, from outreach programs to a more holistic approach to community engagement.

These reforms not only reduce stress among working parents, but they also provide substantial benefits for students. On average, public school students in the United States spend less than seven hours per day in the classroom. However, growing research shows that longer school days can improve student performance; the extended hours increase learning time in the classroom. In fact, one study found that adding 300 instructional hours to the school year is a stronger predictor of achievement than other notable reforms.²¹² The American Institutes

for Research also found that providing additional time for students to learn core academic subjects during the expanded hours improved students' math and reading literacy, and students participating in enrichment activities during these hours increased their social-emotional learning skills.²¹³

Extended school day and year

Perhaps the most notable development has been schools extending the day or calendar year. For instance, the District of Columbia Public Schools recently announced plans to extend the school year by an additional month for 10 traditional public schools in the upcoming 2016-17 school year.²¹⁴ Other schools have done the same, and overall, more than 2,000 schools across the country have added a longer school day or year in the past decade.²¹⁵ These initiatives have allowed students, on average, to gain an additional six weeks of school each year. Across a student's entire K-12 schooling career, this would accumulate to an additional two years of learning time in school, which would certainly support the needs of working parents.²¹⁶

Then there is Harlem's Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School, or TMALS, which primarily serves low-income students and runs from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. each school day.²¹⁷ During the additional hours, TMALS students can participate in community service projects and other activities. This reform effort demonstrates that full-time school schedules do not simply mean that students take additional academic classes but also that these extended days can enable enriching, integrated learning experiences.

In other instances, some districts are rethinking their approach to professional development. For example, the New York City school district offers numerous opportunities for teachers and staff to participate in citywide and school-based events during nonschool hours.²¹⁸

Finally, there are expanded learning time programs. These initiatives extend the school day and year and provide many additional benefits for students, as CAP has long argued.²¹⁹ ELT programs show particularly high outcomes among underserved student populations, such as English language learners.²²⁰ They can also serve to build community.²²¹

Massachusetts has long been a leader in this area of education reform. The state has the only “statewide, publicly funded initiative” on ELT, with almost two dozen schools enrolled in the program.²²² In sum, there are 140 schools in Massachusetts that are implementing longer schedules using federal, state, and local funds. Recent research on ELT programs in Massachusetts and elsewhere show that staff buy-in is critical for these programs to work, and they must be implemented effectively in order to minimize teacher turnover.²²³

The growth of high-performing charter management organizations

Many of the highest-performing national charter management organizations, or CMOs—including the Knowledge Is Power Program, or KIPP; Uncommon Schools, and Achievement First—operate on a longer school day and year as a core part of their model. These schools have grown substantially over the past 20 years. KIPP alone has expanded from three schools in 1995 to 183 schools today.²²⁴ And while some of these schools are pulling back from offering a longer school day, their 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. schedules meet the working needs of parents and offer more time for children to focus on core academic skills.

Reaching out to working parents

Given some of the structural constraints around changing the length of the school day and year, some schools have taken a different approach to engaging working families. The New York City district, for example, has placed a new emphasis on outreach to working parents by increasing the number of parent-teacher conferences from two to four meetings per year, allowing parents more opportunities to engage with their child’s teacher.²²⁵ More importantly, teachers arrange the meeting at a time that works for the parents by reaching out to them weeks in advance.²²⁶

Technology can also play a helpful role, and many schools have been using information technologies to reach parents. Some schools encourage parent-teacher conferences via an online platform such as Skype.²²⁷ A number of technologies such as Edmodo also make it much easier for educators to share information with parents, and a growing number of schools have been using the sites to help teachers provide details on homework and other school events.²²⁸ In some cases, the websites provide the information in almost real time. ClassDojo, for instance, informs a parent when his or her child has misbehaved in class moments after the incident.²²⁹

In some districts, home visits are increasingly common.²³⁰ In parent-teacher home visits, teachers meet with parents in their house. Part of the reason is a matter of trust, as home visits can create a closer relationship between a teacher and a student's family. Home visits also make it easier for working families, particularly low-income ones, to directly communicate with their child's teacher. A number of districts such as Denver, Colorado, and Mason County, Kentucky, have recently taken up the approach.²³¹

This issue is particularly acute when it comes to after-school programs. Unless there is a coordinating entity for these services, after-school programs are a privilege for parents who can access them, afford them, or are able to navigate the complicated process.

Simply put, before- and after-school care should not be an add-on in public schools. If school systems worked as a whole to support the needs of students and families, before- and after-school care would be seamlessly integrated and aligned with the regular school day.

Academic content does not necessarily have to fill those three additional hours of after-school care, to be sure, nor would it need to be taught by teachers. School personnel can leverage partnerships and resources in the community to staff these school-based programs.

Parents are eager for solutions. Launched in 2014, Urban Adventure Squad, a nonprofit that runs experiential learning programs around Washington, D.C., on days when schools are closed, began with just six children.²³² Fewer than two years later, the program serves 325 children, its openings fill within 24 hours, and it maintains a long waiting list. "There is palpable relief that we are providing these high-quality options to families," said Elana Mintz, Urban Adventure Squad's founder and CEO.²³³

Cost models of a 9-to-5 school day

In many areas, one of the most significant barriers to implementing 9-to-5 schools is cost. As previously noted, the average cost of expanding the school day to a 9-to-5 schedule is around \$4 to \$5 per student per additional hour.²³⁴ Here are several models that offer viable funding solutions.

Salary increases. For districts with some flexibility in their budgets, one approach to consider is salary increases for existing staff. In Elizabeth, New Jersey, for instance, the school district expanded its school year by 20 days and extended the school day by 90 minutes through a model focused on additional teacher pay.²³⁵ The district increased the base pay among its instructional staff to reflect the additional hours worked and provided stipends for the facilitation of after-school programming.

This expanded day model came with an annual cost of \$4 million among the district's 20 schools, or approximately \$3.18 per student per hour. The school district covers these costs by blending funding streams from state and local sources as well as Title I and Title III funds.

Flat stipends. Another cost-effective approach is stipends. This pay structure keeps teachers onsite during the expanded hours but for a fraction of the price because annual stipends do not have to “provide a rate of compensation that is proportional” to the hours worked.²³⁶

For instance, McGlone Elementary School in Denver, Colorado, provides teachers with an annual stipend of \$5,000 for the additional 300 hours worked. For the district, this stipend is considerably less expensive than a proportionate salary increase, and by some estimates, it's about half of the expected amount of a base pay increase.²³⁷

Community partnerships. Schools can also form partnerships with local providers, which can provide additional staff at minimal cost. For instance, in community schools—where schools become the hub of a community by partnering with local organizations—the community partner's staff supplements the existing school personnel.

ELT schools in Meriden, Connecticut, for instance, have leveraged their partnership with the local YMCA to bring on additional staff at minimal cost.²³⁸ The school also integrates YMCA services into the regular school day and aligns the programming with the school's learning objectives.²³⁹

Partnerships with national volunteer organizations—such as AmeriCorps—is another creative solution to the cost issue. Citizen Schools, for instance, recruits AmeriCorps volunteers to support middle schools in the implementation of ELT programs. In this model, AmeriCorps teaching fellows supplement the school's

instructional staff by either providing assistance to teachers in classroom instruction or by leading their own enrichment activities. Citizen Schools currently serves more than 5,000 students in 32 middle schools and added more than 240 AmeriCorps members to existing school personnel in the 2015-16 school year.²⁴⁰

AmeriCorps members do not just serve Citizen Schools, however. AmeriCorps VISTA, in particular, recruits more than 8,000 volunteers annually to help support nonprofits, city and county agencies, public school districts, and community-based organizations.²⁴¹ Many of these organizations provide academic interventions, enrichment activities, and additional services to low-income schools during before- and after-school hours. Local nonprofits seeking to implement 9-to-5 schools can partner with AmeriCorps VISTA and enlist their volunteers to help build capacity.

Staggered schedules. In this model, districts simply reallocate the time spent by teachers. In other words, teachers work at varying shift times, but their total work hours do not increase.

At the ELT schools in Meriden, Connecticut, for example, one half of the instructional team arrives to school at an earlier shift time and leaves about 90 minutes before the end of the school day, and the other half arrives later but works throughout the rest of the school day. The overall length of the workday remains unchanged among these instructors. However, the school does bear an opportunity cost due to the fewer number of teachers available at the start and end of the school day.²⁴² The Goldie Maple Academy, which we feature in this report, takes a similar approach.

One notable benefit to staggered schedules is that they do not conflict with union agreements on the length of the teacher workday. For instance, Boston Arts Academy in Boston, Massachusetts, staggers teacher schedules in order to meet contracted workday requirements.²⁴³ The school follows a split schedule where academic instructors work an early shift and nonacademic instructors work a later shift.²⁴⁴ To accommodate the shortage of teachers during the early and late school hours, the school designates the first period for academic instruction and the last period for nonacademic instruction—or put differently, when these instructors would be onsite.

Generation Schools—a next-generation school model—also practices staggered teacher time, but its model not only redesigns the school day but also restructures the entire school year.²⁴⁵ Although students receive an eight-hour school day and 200 school days, Generation Schools staggers teacher schedules so instructors receive a four-week summer vacation in July and two one-month breaks throughout the calendar year—for example, August to June.²⁴⁶

Federal funding sources for expanded school schedules under the Every Student Succeeds Act

There are numerous federal funding sources to provide for the implementation of a 9-to-5 school day. ESSA authorizes the use of federal funds for many reforms that lengthen the school day and currently operate on a 9-to-5 schedule, such as ELT schools, full-service community schools, and Promise Neighborhoods.

ESSA also includes new, important changes to previous federal programs. For instance, states are now required to set aside at least 7 percent of their Title I funds for school improvement purposes.

School districts can also use their Title I, Part A funds to improve school schedules as part of a larger effort to boost student achievement. Some schools participating in ELT programs have already taken advantage of this provision.²⁴⁷

States also now have more flexibility to use funds from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, or CCLC, program in Title IV, Part B for ELT initiatives. In the past, less than 1 percent of CCLC grantees—or 69 out of a possible 10,000—used their funds for ELT initiatives.²⁴⁸ The new flexibility under ESSA changes that, and funds can now be used for ELT-like programs.

Overall, Title I and Title IV under ESSA provide the greatest amount of federal funding for a 9-to-5 school day. However, Title II, which supports teacher professional development, can also be used in these efforts. We map these sources out in greater detail below.²⁴⁹

TABLE 7
Federal funding sources for expanded school schedules under ESSA

Funding source	Fiscal year 2017	Distribution process	Bill language	Districts or schools could...
Title I, Part A				
Schoolwide programs: Provide funding for local educational agencies to implement comprehensive schoolwide programs in Title I schools, where at least 40 percent of children are from low-income backgrounds	Not publicly available	Formula grants	"An eligible school operating a schoolwide program shall develop a comprehensive plan that ... includes a description of the strategies that the school will be implementing to address school needs, including a description of how such strategies will ... increase the amount and quality of learning time."	Increase instructional time by extending the length of the school day from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in Title I schools.
Targeted assistance schools: Identify students who are most at risk of not meeting state academic standards for targeted services	Not publicly available	Formula grants	"Each targeted assistance program under this section shall ... [use] methods and instructional strategies to strengthen the academic program of the school through activities, which may include expanded learning time, before- and after-school programs, and summer programs and opportunities."	Fund ELT programs for identified students.
School improvement: Aims to improve student achievement in Title I schools identified as in need of improvement	Not publicly available	State set-aside of Title I, Part A funding or the amount a state reserved for school improvement previously (no less than 7 percent); rewarded in subgrants to local educational agencies on a formula or competitive basis	"Serve schools implementing comprehensive support and improvement activities or targeted support and improvement activities."	Redesign school days in low-achieving, Title I schools identified as in need of improvement.
Title II, Part A				
Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants: Improve the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals, and school leaders, including through professional development activities	\$2.25 billion	Formula grants to states and subgrants to local educational agencies	"Providing high-quality, personalized professional development that is evidence-based, to the extent the State (in consultation with local educational agencies in the State) determines that such evidence is reasonably available, for teachers, instructional leadership teams, principals, or other school leaders, that is focused on improving teaching and student learning and achievement."	Provide additional time for teacher planning, collaboration, and development in periods throughout the school day.

Funding source	Fiscal year 2017	Distribution process	Bill language	Districts or schools could...
Title II, Part B				
Supporting Effective Educator Development: Provides funding for evidence-based projects in the recruitment, selection, and development of teachers, principals, or both	\$100 million	Competitive grants to institutions of higher education or national nonprofit organizations	"Providing evidence-based professional development activities that address literacy, numeracy, remedial, or other needs of local educational agencies and the students the agencies serve."	Provide additional time for teacher planning, collaboration, and development in periods throughout the regular school day.
Title IV, Part A				
Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants: Increase students' access to a well-rounded education and provide funding for technology-based learning	\$500 million	Formula grants	"Develop and implement programs and activities that support access to a well-rounded education."	Fund additional time for activities identified as "well-rounded," including in science, technology, engineering, and math; performing arts; American history; civics; and other enrichment activities.
Title IV, Part B				
21st Century Community Learning Centers: Provide funding for a broad array of academic and enrichment activities for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools	\$1 billion	Discretionary and competitive subgrants to local educational agencies	"A state that receives funds under this part for a fiscal year may use funds under section 4202(c)(1) to support those enrichment and engaging academic activities ... that are included as part of an expanded learning program that provides students at least 300 additional program hours before, during, or after the traditional school day."	Increase instructional time by extending the length of the school day from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Title IV, Part F				
Education Innovation and Research: Expands the investment in and implementation of innovative, evidence-based practices proven to improve student achievement and reduce achievement disparities—such as high school graduation and college enrollment	\$180 million	Competitive grants to state education agencies; local educational agencies; consortia of state education agencies and local educational agencies; nonprofit organizations; or in partnership with business, educational service agencies, or institutions of higher education	"Create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field-initiated innovations to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students."	Embed the concept of 9-to-5 school day in early-phase and mid-phase grant application, relying on the evidence base for ELT.

Funding source	Fiscal year 2017	Distribution process	Bill language	Districts or schools could...
Promise Neighborhoods: Provide for the implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated continuum of services from preschool through high school in high-poverty, distressed communities	\$2 million	Competitive grants to local educational agencies; nonprofit organizations; or in partnership with business, educational service agencies, or institutions of higher education	"Supporting, enhancing, operating, or expanding rigorous, comprehensive, effective educational improvements, which may include ... expanded learning time."	Provide longer school days that include a broad array of academic interventions, enrichment activities, and social services.
Full-Service Community Schools: Fund partnerships between local educational agencies and community-based organizations in providing additional programming and services in school settings	\$1 million	Competitive grants to local educational agencies; nonprofit organizations; or in partnership with business, educational service agencies, or institutions of higher education	"Improve the coordination and integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools."	Provide longer school days by contracting services from youth development organizations, institutions of higher education, and other community-based organizations.

Sources: *Every Student Succeeds Act*, H. Rept. 114-354, 114 Cong. 1 sess. (2015), available at http://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/every_student_succeeds_act_-_conference_report.pdf; U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Summary and Background Information* (2016), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget17/summary/17summary.pdf>.

Recommendations

School systems should provide better options for working parents and be more aligned with their needs. This reform needs to be more than an add-on program; it needs to be a clear change in mindset. In many ways, the debate over school schedules is often set up as school vs. no school. But that's shortsighted, and for many schools, a more logical day would have kids participate in several extracurricular opportunities throughout the day, whether they are through sports clubs; performing arts groups; science, technology, engineering, and math education; adult mentorships; or simply unrestricted play.

In the same way that districts offer magnet schools with a focus on arts, technology, or international education, they should add full-day, family-centered schools to their portfolio of offerings. Charter schools could also pursue this type of model, and many already have.²⁵⁰

More broadly, advocates for a better educational system should do more to engage parents in the school schedule reform debate. In this regard, expanded learning time reforms offer a helpful lesson. Visit the website of most advocates of ELT, and people will find little mention of benefits to parents. From a reform perspective, this approach does not make much immediate sense. Advocates of ELT should be more intentional in marketing these policies as meaningful solutions to support working families.

Furthermore, schools should also develop coherent full-day schedules that are responsive to students' developmental needs and biological rhythms: a mix of physical activity and academic learning in the morning, rest or downtime in the early afternoon, time to run in the midafternoon, and then additional academic classes before pickup in the late afternoon.

By creating full-day schedules that are driven by students' needs and staffed creatively, schools could ensure that all aspects of the day are aligned toward supporting students' social, emotional, and physical development. The staff and faculty

administering the all-day schedule would be part of the same institution, and there would be more continuity and communication among faculty members who support students throughout the day. The academic learning would also be more aligned toward the state's learning standards. These redesigned schedules should also allow teachers to have more time to collaborate with their peers and prepare for their upcoming classes.

At the federal level, CAP recommends the following:

- **Foster innovative approaches to aligning school and work schedules and supporting working parents.** The president should use his convening power to host a White House conference on supporting working families through improved school schedules, and he should bring together diverse stakeholders to solve these problems. This summit would unify key leaders on this issue—from parent groups to teachers unions to community-based organizations and employers—to discuss potential solutions. The event would also highlight best practices, from ensuring that students will have downtime during a longer school day to making sure that teachers do not work longer hours for the same pay.

The Department of Education should build on this work by creating and supporting a working group of school and district leaders, and other community and business partners and leaders, committed to working on this issue and sharing best practices. The working group would help leaders share best practices and programs and discuss innovative ways to help schools meet the needs of working parents. The Department of Education could use the national activity set-asides to fund these efforts.

Through guidance—and future legislation—the federal government should also send a clear message that districts ought to align the schedules of schools with the typical work schedule more closely, and they ought to prioritize schools serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds in ways that improve student outcomes.

- **Promote the use of Title I, Part A dollars for expanded school schedules, and increase other federal funding sources for a 9-to-5 school day.** Current federal law allows schools and districts to spend Title I dollars on extending the school day, and for its part, the Department of Education recently sent out a letter encouraging the use of Title I dollars for summer learning programs.²⁵¹

Over the years, some districts have also used Title I funds to help promote a more comprehensive approach to school schedules.²⁵² In Evansville, Indiana, for instance, the local school district has used Title I funds to help promote after-school programs, as well as other initiatives to support parent engagement.²⁵³

However, as the authors found in their work, many states and districts are simply not aware that the largest pot of federal funds can be used for extending the school day. The department should clarify the use of these funds for these initiatives and issue new guidance that makes these changes clear and concrete. For instance, the Every Student Succeeds Act requires districts implementing comprehensive schoolwide programs in Title I schools to first conduct a school-level needs assessment, and the Department of Education should issue guidance on the assessment of need for improved school schedules.

At the same time, Congress should appropriate additional funds for the programs that support expanded learning time programs, community schools, and after-school programming under ESSA, including:

- The Title IV, Part A block grants to states to provide student support services
- The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which traditionally supports after-school programs for low-income students and now includes a competitive subgrant program for ELT
- Promise Neighborhoods, which is a competitive grant program run by the Department of Education supporting a continuum of family and community services, from preschool through high school, in high-poverty communities
- Full-Service Community Schools, which supports the development of a coordinated set of academic, social, and health services for children and families in schools

Again, the department should issue guidance clarifying the use of these funds for extending the school day as well as meeting the working needs of parents. Under ESSA, the aforementioned programs already require districts to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. The 21st CCLC program, for instance, stipulates that entities conduct evaluations that “include the needs of working families.”²⁵⁴ The department can specify the purpose of these evaluations for strategic planning around innovative school schedules. The federal government should also expand the definition of community school coordinators—traditionally a role in the Full-Service Community School model—and make it easier for schools and districts to fund such positions.²⁵⁵

- **Create a pilot program that supports a 9-to-5 approach to schooling.**

Congress should also launch a new competitive grant program for 9-to-5 schools. For instance, with the impending reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, Congress could fund initiatives encouraging partnerships between graduate schools and public school districts. These university-school partnerships would provide for additional services and programming during the expanded school days.

These sorts of programs have shown some success within the community schools space, particularly in the “university-assisted community school model.”²⁵⁶ In this model, undergraduate and graduate students help lead the expanded-day programs, and faculty members use their expertise to contribute to strategic planning, fundraising, and curriculum development. More than 80 colleges and universities are now partnering with traditional public schools to create expanded learning opportunities—ranging from project-based learning to service learning—beyond the traditional school hours.²⁵⁷

States should take the following steps:

- **Promote the 9-to-5 school day and compensate teachers who want to work longer hours.** Teachers should not have to work longer hours without additional compensation. In states with statewide salary schedules, states could create policies that would allow schools to compensate teachers with additional pay. Districts receiving funding from Massachusetts’ ELT initiative, for instance, provided additional compensation to their existing teachers in order for them to remain onsite during the extended hours. This compensation included salary increases, stipends, and contractual hourly rates.²⁵⁸ Alternatively, though, schools could hire part-time teachers or other adults to cover some of these extended hours through a state-run program.

States should also create more schools that align with typical work schedules. This should be done through a competitive grant program that is targeted at low-income schools. For instance, Massachusetts’ statewide ELT initiative prioritizes its grants for low-income districts, and in fiscal year 2014, 77 percent of students in the state’s ELT schools were low income.²⁵⁹

States should also increase their dedicated amount of funding for school-based health center initiatives. States should allow schools to use these funds for medical personnel who could provide sick-child day care if a parent or guardian is unable to stay home with their child. This flexibility would allow schools to provide alternative arrangements for sick students at school, and parents who do not have access to paid parental leave or paid sick leave will not run the risk of losing their job if the school requires an immediate parent pickup.

- **Rethink requirements on instructional time.** Current state guidelines on instructional time are outdated. In some states, no requirements on the length of the school day even exist.²⁶⁰ For instance, more than one-third of states do not have a requirement on minimum instructional time in the units of hours or minutes.²⁶¹ More than a dozen states also have not set a minimum number of hours to constitute a school day.²⁶²

States should increase the minimum number of hours that students are required to be in school. If states raised the minimum length of a school day to eight hours, for instance, this policy change would naturally lead to school schedules that are more aligned with the typical workday. This change would also allow more time for physical education, recess, enrichment, and electives.

States should also set appropriate restrictions on schoolwide and districtwide closings. For instance, states should roll back laws that ban districts from starting or ending the school year before specific dates in the fall and spring. As a standard, CAP believes that throughout the school year, districts should only close for federal holidays and no more than two additional weeks in order to align with the average worker's paid vacation time. Days off beyond that should be restricted to emergencies or covered with field trips and school-based care, excluding summer break.

Districts and schools should take the following steps, among others:

- **Offer family-centered schools.** Districts should introduce a new school model of choice called family-centered schools into their portfolios. These schools would organize themselves explicitly to support working families by limiting the days when school is closed to only major national holidays; offering an 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily schedule; reinventing parent-teacher communication

to eliminate parent-teacher conferences at school during the day and allow for more calls, texts, and other one-off, technology-enabled solutions; adopting more parent-friendly health policies; and more.

Districts could solicit proposals for charter schools with this intentional approach and/or could establish incentives for district-run schools to adopt this model in the same way that districts encourage and establish magnet schools or specialty schools focused on bilingualism, technology, Montessori, International Baccalaureate, design and architecture, health professions, and other specialty models. Districts should maintain a waiting list or find an alternative way to assess and track demand in order to project the need for these types of schools.

Districts should prioritize providing access to these schools to low-income families and where there is great need. In low-income schools, the district can cover the additional costs through Title I, Part A under the Schoolwide Program.

In mixed-income and higher-income communities, districts can offer 9-to-5 schools through some combination of public and private funding sources. School administrators can prorate program fees by family income, but low-income students would not have to pay additional fees; Title I, Part A would bear the cost. Another alternative is a portfolio model. In this approach, schools would offer a portfolio model of approved providers, such as Urban Adventure Squad and other local after-care programs. These providers would pick up students from school or use school facilities. Parents would bear all additional costs.

Districts should consult parents in the planning and implementation of their family-centered school schedules. Parent consultation and a family needs assessment are paramount to ensuring that new schedules both align with the standard workday and satisfy the needs of local parents. District administrators should also make sure that their outreach is inclusive of households with different income levels and family structures.

- **Conduct a comprehensive parent needs assessment.** A comprehensive parent needs assessment should occur well before the implementation of 9-to-5 schools. Without in-depth knowledge of the challenges parents face, school districts may create well-meaning programs that do not meet the needs of parents. School districts should conduct a thorough needs assessment that surveys working parents and determines which expanded scheduling policies best serve them. Districts should prioritize the needs of low-income and struggling families on this issue.

The surveys can reveal important information. For instance, a high-poverty school in Washington state recently administered a parent needs assessment, and the school found that local parents had a range of educational, linguistic, physical, social, and emotional needs that limited their ability to engage in traditionally viewed forms of parental involvement. In response, the school created a Family Resource Center to serve as an information hub for the parents. The center also provides social services, including a food and clothing drive.²⁶³

Community schools also typically conduct parent needs assessments to determine which community partners—from youth development organizations to faith-based groups and churches—would interest their families. The surveys specifically ask parents to identify the additional programs and services they would like to see at their child’s school.²⁶⁴

Schools and districts interested in creating 9-to-5 schools should follow suit by asking parents which scheduling practices they would like to see implemented at their child’s school. School districts can administer these assessments through electronic surveys, focus groups, personal interviews, town hall meetings, and community forums.

- **Create—and fund—new schedules in creative ways.** Schools could enlarge the size of certain classes or create experiences for larger groups of students on certain days. They should follow the lead of promising, cost-effective models such as Goldie Maple Academy in Queens, New York, which recently extended its school day from 8:00 a.m. to 4:35 p.m. with no significant increase in spending.²⁶⁵ At the school, teachers now work eight-hour days, four days per week, while students attend from 8:30 a.m. to 4:35 p.m. This reform allows students to have additional time throughout their five-day school week, while the teachers get an extra day off. Goldie Maple Academy has been able to implement this model successfully by assigning teachers to specific subjects rather than to a classroom of students.

At the same time, districts should also proactively send out information about teachers, aides, or other school personnel willing to watch students or groups of students on days off. Ideally, school buildings would be open for these informal school days, but if that is not possible, school personnel could go to another

location to care for children. School districts could also host AmeriCorps members or other national service programs as a cost-effective approach to gaining additional staff for the extended hours. National service volunteers can fill supportive roles as mentors, tutors, and other personnel at a school. Staff from other community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, libraries, museums, parks and recreation departments, and local employers, as well as college and older high school students, might serve as staff as well.

- **Leverage community resources and partner with community-based entities.** Schools should work with community providers in operating before- and after-school programs on school grounds rather than at facilities located outside the school building. Schools need to break down barriers and make it easier for outside organizations to use the school facilities. In addition, more effective and seamless communication between schools and after-school programs can help align after-school programming with the school day. Such measures would provide better accommodations for low-income families. Under ESSA, Title I-eligible schools may use Title I funds for these purposes.²⁶⁶ They could also solicit volunteers from the community to teach occasional or afternoon courses, or they could establish mentorship programs to allow students to learn from adults in the community. Ideally, schools should fully manage the operations of an expanded, family-centered school. However, if there are funding and capacity constraints, schools should leverage services from external organizations but still serve as a point of contact and coordination between parents and community providers.
- **Redefine how professional development is delivered.** Districts should stop the practice of full-day school closures for professional development. Instead, they should utilize high-quality professional development strategies that can be embedded throughout the school day, including teacher collaboration and planning time, individualized coaching, classroom observations, evaluations from outside experts, and trainings on data analysis. Districts can also run citywide leadership development events during nonschool hours. They can also explore the use of online platforms, such as Knowledge Delivery Systems,²⁶⁷ for professional development and professional learning among educators, which would reduce the need for full-day closures for these purposes.
- **Better accommodate disadvantaged families and support more parental involvement.** Schools should also better respond to the needs of low-income, single-parent, or otherwise disadvantaged family households. For instance,

many parents and guardians have inflexible work schedules, and districts should play their part in implementing family-friendly school policies that are flexible and negotiable, not a mandate.

Schools should make every effort to accommodate parents' work schedules when scheduling parent-teacher conferences, student work expos, or similar events. For instance, schools can host parent-teacher conferences in the mornings, evenings, or on weekends. Schools could also provide alternative parent outreach options such as virtual conferences or regular emails and phone calls. Teacher home visits are another strong alternative to school-based conferences. As mentioned earlier, many low-income parents find it difficult to attend parent-teacher conferences due to the inconvenience in traveling from the workplace to the school, and their employers may not even offer such flexibility.

Some high-poverty schools, such as Hobgood Elementary School in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, have looked to teacher home visits as a solution.²⁶⁸ To encourage participation, schools may offer additional compensation to teachers who visit students and families in their home. These visits both encourage parental involvement and allow teachers to learn more about their students and different family backgrounds.²⁶⁹

In addition, many working parents and guardians, including most low-wage and part-time workers, have no paid leave at all and must work even on federal holidays, which limits their ability to supervise their child when they are not in school. Districts can use Title I funds to hire site resource coordinators to manage school-based before- and after-school care, and these coordinators can also assist families with arranging care during school closings. Schools should also leverage partnerships with community food banks, emergency food pantries, and other local nonprofits to ensure that students can still access meals on days schools are closed, in order to decrease incidences of food insecurity.²⁷⁰

In addition, districts should reform absence policies related to student sickness and only focus on the illnesses that pose serious harm to students' health or significantly detract from a student's ability to learn. Nits, tiredness, and coughing are not reasons to send a child home from school.

Administrators should take the following steps:

- **Negotiate more efficient bus schedules.** Many school districts follow a multitiered busing schedule system in order to save on transportation costs. For example, a single bus can run three routes in one morning instead of three buses running one route each. As a consequence, however, elementary, middle, and high schools start and end their days at significantly different times. Administrators should work with transportation companies to identify alternatives to tiered busing schedules, such as dual-route systems, that would enable all grade levels to follow a full-time school schedule without significantly increasing costs.

Another approach is public transportation. School districts can provide transportation passes to high school students in order to save funds and minimize the need for a tiered busing schedule. Districts should also explore other areas of their budget in which they can trim costs in order to make room for the longer schedules.

- **Leverage technology to communicate with parents and better target days off.** Administrators should offer parent-teacher conferences via an online platform such as Skype or replace formal parent-teacher conferences with regular phone calls and emails. A number of technologies, such as Edmodo, have made it easier for educators to share information with parents, and while some advocates have expressed privacy concerns, more schools should take advantage of these potential solutions.²⁷¹ Schools can also explore the use of online platforms, such as Knowledge Delivery Systems,²⁷² for professional development and professional learning among educators, which would reduce the need for full-day closures for these purposes.
- **Align school year calendars and take cues from major employers about emergency closings.** Schools within an area should align their school calendar and scheduling policies closely. Parents with children in multiple grade levels and school types—traditional public, charter, or independent—often have to navigate different school schedules and calendars. If these schools significantly diverge in their daily bell schedules, calendar dates, early dismissals, and closings, parents may have to secure child care arrangements on more than double the number of occasions.

Local officials should convene school administrators and ask them to work together to devise a unified school schedule. Alternatively, charter and independent schools should align their calendars with the largest public school system in the area. While charter schools should retain their autonomy on instructional time, administrators should ensure that their policies do not create additional inconveniences for working parents.

Also, school administrators should take their cues on local emergencies and weather-related closings from local government agencies and major employers, barring reasonable exceptions.

Conclusion

Schools should be responsive to the needs of both children and parents in their communities. A true, family-centered school is intentional about providing extended-day programs that keep children safe, offer opportunities to grow and thrive, and support working families. Ideally, all schools should be open beyond traditional school hours. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

School policies must evolve with the changing demographics of the nation and actively respond to the daily challenges and frustrations experienced by many working parents. Schools were created for the community, and it is the school's responsibility to be aware of what does and does not work for students and their families. Expanded school schedules provide children with enriching opportunities to succeed while also recognizing the needs of the modern American family.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

For this project, CAP researchers conducted a number of different analyses. First, the researchers conducted a survey of the largest school districts in the country, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics. CAP researchers looked specifically at a number of policies, including instructional time and daily bell schedules, for each district. For a full list of indicators and sources, please see Appendix 2.

In some cities, CAP researchers gathered the data on district policies from district websites. In other areas, they called or emailed repeatedly to gain the information. The researchers conducted the survey during summer and fall 2015. As part of this project, CAP researchers also analyzed data from the Schools and Staffing Survey, a federal and nationally representative study of schools. For that analysis, the researchers relied on data from the 2011-12 school year.

Out-of-pocket costs

To calculate out-of-pocket costs due to misaligned school schedules, CAP researchers first estimated the number of days—converted into hours—and after-school hours that schools are closed when typical workplaces are open. Researchers relied on 2015-16 school year data collected from the largest school districts about closings due to holidays, recess breaks, and staff development days, finding an average of 29 school closings for the year.

Researchers also relied on a 2013 Center for Economic and Policy Research report that found the number of paid holidays and vacation days for a full-time, private-sector worker with access to paid leave to be 16. Since CAP's analysis excludes summer recess from these calculations, researchers prorated the number of paid leave days over the school year. The difference between the number of school closings and a worker's available paid leave days would be the excess number of days off.

CAP researchers also calculated out-of-pocket costs during after-school hours. Researchers relied on the Schools and Staffing Survey for data on the length of the school day and relied on the 2014 American Time Use Survey for data on standard work hours. According to the 2012 Schools and Staffing Survey, the median school start time is 8:05 a.m., and the median length of the school day is 405 minutes, or 6.75 hours. CAP researchers assumed that the typical school day ends at 2:50 pm. According to the 2014 American Time Use Survey, 70 percent of working adults report working until 5:00 p.m. CAP researchers also included the mean commuting time between the workplace and home, approximately 26 minutes each way.

After finding the number of excess hours, CAP researchers multiplied the resulting figure by the mean hourly wage for child care workers. CAP researchers used the wage estimates for child care workers in the Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2015 Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. The authors also used the Bureau of the Census' 2015 Current Population Survey to determine family income.

Lost productivity

The authors estimated two forms of lost productivity due to misaligned school and work schedules. First, CAP researchers partnered with economists Diane Schanzenbach and Lauren Bauer at The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution to analyze the proportion of women who have elementary-school-age children and work full time. They compared that figure with the proportion of women who have secondary-school-age children and work full time. Because researchers did not find a difference in part-time employment rates, for the purposes of this calculation, CAP researchers assumed that the entire gap in full-time employment rates between mothers of elementary-school-age children and mothers of secondary-school-age children could be attributed to their caregiving responsibilities.

The researchers assumed that if school schedules were aligned with the typical workday—9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.—there would be higher full-time employment rates among mothers whose youngest child was in elementary school, equivalent to that of mothers whose youngest child was in secondary school. The present gap in full-time employment rates between mothers of elementary-school-age children and mothers of secondary-school-age children—53 percent and 60 percent, respectively—results in productivity loss.

To create these estimates, the researchers relied on the 2015 Current Population Survey, which collects data on labor force participation, full-time employment, wages, and population estimates for working-age mothers. CAP researchers estimated the increase in the workforce if mothers of elementary-school-age children were to work full time at the same rate as mothers of middle- and high-school-age children. CAP researchers then multiplied this difference, just more than 1 million women, by the median annual wage of full-time working women with elementary-school-age children to estimate the productivity loss.

Secondly, CAP researchers estimated lost productivity due to school closings, or what the authors call the I Don't Know How She Does It problem. Again, researchers relied on the number of days that schools are closed throughout the school year, 29, and the average number of paid holiday and vacation days each year, 16, and prorated the number of paid leave days over the school year. The authors excluded from the analysis households with a nonworking adult, focusing solely on households where all residing adults are employed.

Researchers then estimated the number of working families that are likely to be affected by the misalignment between school and work schedules. To reach this estimate, researchers first subtracted the proportion of children who are cared for by grandparents, siblings or other relatives, or nonrelatives who live in the family's home. They relied on Lynda Laughlin's 2013 report for the Bureau of the Census, "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements." The authors used the data on percentage of children whose child care was provided by grandparents, siblings, and other relatives for school-age children with working mothers. In 2014, there were 13 million households in the United States with school-age children and employed parents.

Finally, the researchers multiplied the number of misaligned hours by the median hourly wage for women with elementary-school-age children, as determined by the 2015 Current Population Survey March Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Appendix 2: Sources

For this project, CAP researchers did a survey of the largest school districts, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics. CAP researchers looked specifically at the following policies:

- Number of instructional days in the school year
- Number of instructional hours in the school year
- Number of student nonattendance days throughout the school year, categorized by holidays and in-service staff attendance days
- Whether the schools have an early dismissal one day per week
- Prevalence of half days and/or staggered school starts at the beginning and end of semesters and the school year
- State legislative requirements on instructional time
- School start and end times
- Whether the district offers school-based before- and after-school care
- Cost of district-provided care at schools
- Timing of parent-teacher conferences—that is to say, do they occur during the school day?

The authors reviewed these policies with information and materials from the following school districts.

New York City Department of Education, New York:

New York City Department of Education, “2015-16 School Year Calendar” (2015), available at http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/A3D17228-63C2-4178-89FC-0BE130C616BE/0/201516SchoolYearCalendar_Revised83115.pdf.

New York City Department of Education, “Parent Teacher Conferences 2015-16,” available at <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/075BB1B9-2F2F-4E9A-BA7F-734628FC791D/0/201516ParentTeacherConferencesMemofinal.pdf> (last accessed May 2016).

Los Angeles Unified School District, California:

Los Angeles Unified School District, “2015-16 Instructional Calendars,” available at <http://achieve.lausd.net/Page/8077> (last accessed May 2016).

Chicago Public Schools, Illinois:

Chicago Public Schools, “2015-2016 CPS Calendar: Elementary and High Schools” (2016), available at http://cps.edu/SiteCollectionDocuments/SY15_16Calendar_English.pdf.

Chicago Public Schools, “CPS to Preserve \$13.5 Million in Classroom Funding by Streamlining Transportation and Changing School Bell Times,” Press release, July 30, 2015, available at http://cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/PR1_7_30_2015.aspx.

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The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

Our Values

As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

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