

*Time Alone Is Not on the Side of Many Students; Unless We Use It Differently
And in Partnership*

Council of Urban Boards of Education Conference

San Antonio, Texas

Remarks by Terry Peterson

October 2, 2004

It is very good to be with you. You truly do symbolize what is great about American education. You are working to provide the opportunities and direction to all children to achieve and succeed, regardless of their background. Leading and teaching in urban schools are some of most difficult...and most rewarding work.

As a parent and stepparent of five children who attended and graduated from one of your CUBE districts, let me thank you personally. By the way, my children, who are now in their late twenties and early thirties, credit a significant part of their successes to their public school experiences in an urban district? I always ask them what about your terrific father, doesn't he count? "Yeah, dad you helped too." What is interesting is that they are succeeding in very different fields. So they and I thank you again.

As you well know, the national debate over education success is not necessarily the broad experiences my children are referring to. Yes, it is important the children read, write, and do math and science well. But it is also critical that schools and their supporters take a broader view of education too.

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For our children to be truly successful today and tomorrow, they need a Basics Plus Curriculum. This Basic Plus Curriculum obviously includes the basics, but also includes what I call 21st Century skills: creativity and the arts, the capacity to work in teams, use technology, be savvy about international issues and cultures, know 2 or 3 languages in addition to English, and learn to serve their community.

Some say that these 21st Century skills are for somebody else's kids, not for those who may have some risk factors. It is just the opposite. Our children in urban districts need these opportunities the most. After all, it is our nation's metro areas, according to the book "Creative Class," that is providing the power behind our economic growth and competitiveness in this great country.

As school district leaders, you are faced with defining achievement in ways that are meaningful and useful to your communities and then providing your students with the opportunities to succeed.

Realities of families today impact your work, too. Most are doing the best they can, and some are struggling. The number of mothers in the workforce increased dramatically between 1947 and 1999—for preschool children almost 5 times. By 1999, almost 80% of mothers were in the labor force (Lombardi, 2004). For them, home alone after school is not a funny movie.

In an election year, we hear a lot about family values. It seems to me that transforming schools to community learning centers open later to support children and families to expand their skills is an important "family value." It helps businesses too.

In today's rapidly changing global society, many of our students need the support of not only their schools to learn the Basics Plus Curriculum, but also more community support and more time.

For many students, “time is not on their side unless we use it differently.” Also many local residents and groups are willing to help you and our young people, but our schools are often not organized to use them well. And the public understand this, in the recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (2004), 94% or more supported two items to close the achievement gap: Encourage parent involvement and provide more instructional time.

I want to share some powerful facts about time and how collaboration with families and the community can help you with your work. Let’s look together at three time issues:

1. Time and preschoolers,
2. Summers and lost learning time,
3. Time afterschool,

Time and Preschoolers

Clearly, children entering kindergarten have very different levels of readiness skills. Children from low-income homes and whose parents do not have a high school education tend to come to kindergarten with fewer words in their vocabulary. They have fewer math readiness skills. They have few social skills.

In kindergarten, low-income and high-income students both learn about the same amount, but the gap in learning they started with often continues after kindergarten. Clearly, time is not on the side for some of our preschool children unless we use it better.

However, these circumstances can be changed. Parents can be encouraged to read to their children and talk and sing to them. Providing full day 3 and 4-year-old education programs make a positive difference, too.

Summers and Lost Learning Time

Let's move on and talk about time and summer learning loss.

There is a body of research that shows that over the summer the typical low-income child loses 2-3 months of achievement.

Think of the cumulative effect over 12 years of losing 2 to 3 months of learning over the summer. This is one more reminder that time is not on some of children's side unless we use it better.

Similar to the findings on kindergarten, many elementary students from high and low-income children learn about the same between fall and spring. But many start and end with the same gaps in place. Comprehensive summer school programs can help reduce the loss.

However the duration and intensity of summer schools has to be strong enough to make a difference. The learning loss in the summers won't be counteracted by running only a 2-3 week program for a couple hours a day. For more information, contact the Center for Summer Learning at John Hopkins University (www.summerlearning.org).

Time and Afterschool

Just as summers are often an unused learning resource so are the hours from 3 to 6 PM each school day. Here too we have growing evidence that leaving children and youth unoccupied doesn't help them. Fight Crime Invest in Kids has found that the highest time of youth crime is right after the school day ends until 6 or 7 PM.

Children's minds don't stop at 3 or 3:30 when the school bell rings.

And children are not going to learn what they didn't learn during the school day by simply repeating the same thing the same way afterschool. Afterschool programs should include intentional learning and connect to the school day, but be interesting.

The afterschool setting is also a terrific venue to build on-going support from the community, civic, college, sports and art groups. Please visit the Afterschool Alliance Website for examples (www.afterschoolalliance.org).

I have a shorthand way to identify quality afterschool programs. I call them the “six E’s of successful afterschool.” They are:

Engaging so students want to participate regularly.

They are full of enriching experiences building a broader foundation of skills.

They provide extra connections, hands and hope to learn more and achieve in core subjects.

The expertise in the community and schools are mutually shared.

Excellence and high Expectations permeate the entire program.

And finally the program has energetic staff even at 5 PM—there isn't a lot of sitting around in good afterschool programs.

Now let's put all of these dynamics together. Many students need extra time and help to meet higher academic standards and make annual yearly progress required by No Child Left Behind. We want our students to have 21st Century skills too.

And by the way, knowledge and information is growing at an enormous rate. Stored information increased by 5 exabytes between 1999-2003 (Lyman and Varian, 2003). This is equivalent to a half a million libraries the size of the Library of Congress.

My old boss, Dick Riley, former United States Secretary of Education, says with this rapid increase in information, we should call this time the “education era” not the “information age.” Only with more and better education can we turn all this information into something useful. Given these facts, one would assume that expanding learning time—in the summers and afterschool—is, as my kids would say “a no brainer.” But, it seems that we are permanently locked into a 175-180 day school year and an 8 AM to 3 PM schedule.

Yet most everything else in our society is moving to 24/7. I am not here to advocate 24/7 schooling for children. But I must tell you that keeping the schoolhouse doors locked for 80% of the time that children are awake makes no sense! It particularly makes no sense in this “information age” and “education era.”

Further, it makes even less sense when we are already paying for the construction and maintenance of the school buildings and sports facilities. We are already paying for the libraries, computers, and laboratories--all sitting in locked schools.

Why not use them? Also a study by a national museum group found the least time they are used is 3- 6 PM. If all this makes sense to anyone, please raise your hand? I knew you were smart, but you are even smarter than I thought.

Not all the news however is bleak. There are some very positive countervailing forces that can give you some tools, policies, funding and leadership lessons on how to expand learning time and partnerships.

For example, the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has been real catalyst for afterschool. And the recent effort by the White House to cut back this initiative was beaten back in Congress by Republicans and Democrats. But the

current \$1 billion, it is still not near enough---in America today over 14 million children go home alone afterschool (JC Penney Afterschool Fund, 2004). This program should be doubled. You and your association should strongly advocate for the authorized level of \$2 billion for 21st Century Centers for next year.

Another example--districts are more creatively using federal TANF monies, Title I, the Supplemental Services provision of Title I and childcare funds to increase engaging afterschool programs.

The Afterschool Alliance and its information and resources including the events: “Lights On Afterschool” and Afterschool Day on the Hill can be of help to you. Please get involved with the Afterschool Alliance activities.

Public opinion polls show strong support for afterschool even with the downturn in the economy. “Eighty-eight percent of voters believe that afterschool programs are an absolute necessity for their community (Afterschool Alliance, 2003).

Gaining more state support for afterschool programs is a growing interest. Twenty-five states have formed statewide afterschool networks. The referendum for afterschool in California offers another approach. A promising new frontier is changing state school finance formulas to include afterschool. A group called Mass. 2020 has filed amicus brief arguing this very point in Massachusetts. In a school finance trial in South Carolina, I gave evidence that the state should fund afterschool and summer learning. You might want to get involved in these strategies too.

In some communities and states, there is the potential of constructing new schools. Why not build them differently—to house engaging, comprehensive afterschool programs and to be

centers of communities or community schools. The KnowledgeWorks Foundation in Ohio is a great resource.

Finally one of the most promising strategies is the leadership provided by a number of urban districts—e.g., Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, New York, Anchorage, Fort Worth and others. Some of you are becoming “time busters.”

Often these efforts include community organizations, youth and sports groups, colleges and arts agencies. These partnerships speak directly to a goal of the National School Boards Association and that is to build public will to value and invest in public education. When a group or individual is personally involved in afterschool or summer programs, they have more of a buy-in to public education.

In summary, quality afterschool and summer learning built through school-community-family partnerships have four positive impacts:

- They can improve student achievement, both in the basics and developing other 21st Century skills.
- They help working families.
- They keep kids safe.
- And they help build public support for public schools because taxpayers and citizens see their schools used more effectively.

But none of this happens by accident. No one group or agency is legally responsible for afterschool or summer learning. That makes your leadership role so important. Board members have one foot in the school and one in the community.

Your superintendents and associate superintendents are obviously school and community leaders too. You have a unique role in setting the framework for additional learning time and new partnerships.

Expanding afterschool and summer learning opportunities is at a very important crossroads. We probably should remember a quote by Yogi Berra here: “when you come to a fork in the road take it.” But not every road will help public education. School board and district leaders can take afterschool and summer learning in positive new directions—increasing engaging learning time and creating new partners for your work.

We need good policies developed. We need funding for full-time afterschool and community learning center coordinators in schools. We need more employer, parent, community and senior citizen engagement. Does this sound like something you can make happen? Does this include you? The answer is hopefully “yes.”

As I close, please keep in mind a beautiful and powerful quote. It is from Dr. Benjamin Mays, the mentor to Martin Luther King. Dr. Mays wrote:

“It isn’t a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled,
But it is a calamity not to dream.”

Dr. Mays had those dreams and delivered on them as a son of a sharecropper and grandson of a slave. Surely, as important local education leaders, you try to do no less.

Thank you.

Now we will actually hear from folks who are in the middle of expanding learning time and school community connections—my colleagues on the panel with me.