



Meriden Public Schools: Redesigning the School Day with Community Partners in Mind

The Meriden Public Schools District first began collaborative discussions with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in 2011 to determine if and how learning time might be expanded for their students. Meriden leaders agreed that if students were to become successful, happy, and engaged citizens, they needed to spend more time in school than the current schedule allowed. They also wanted to offer students different kinds of learning experiences to engage them in a new and meaningful way.

This belief drove the district to integrate community partners into the school day, using the community school approach as a vehicle for expanded learning opportunities.

"Our extended learning time schools are providing our students with the enrichment and hands-on learning opportunities that lead to greater student success. Our community providers share their expertise alongside our teachers and staff, and they have become instrumental partners in the reengineered school day. By giving students more choice and greater voice, we are building schools where students and staff want to be." - Dr. Mark Benigni, Superintendent of Meriden Public Schools District

With support from the AFT's [Innovation Fund](#), Meriden began planning their expanded time strategy in 2011 and soon participated in a five-state initiative — the [TIME Collaborative](#) — that was launched in 2012 by the [National Center on Time and Learning](#) and the [Ford Foundation](#). The district's extended school day model was designed to add 100 minutes per day; Casimir Pulaski Elementary was the pilot site in SY 12-13. Pulaski's initial success – marked by academic gains, increased attendance rates, and positive student perceptions of the school – motivated the district to expand the program to John Barry Elementary in SY 13-14 and add Roger Sherman Elementary in SY 14-15.

The Enrichment Block

At Pulaski, Barry, and Sherman, schedules have been reengineered to include the *Enrichment Block*, a 100-minute time period for community partners to staff the classrooms as teachers and provide instruction in Meriden's three key enrichment areas: STEM, literacy, and healthy living. During the Healthy Living Enrichment Block, for example, Meriden's Department of Health and the YMCA provide nutritional classes to promote students' health awareness and physical well-being. The University of Connecticut's undergraduate students also offer early K-3 literacy programming.

Since partners assume the instructional role during the Enrichment Block, this strategy alleviates some of the pressure on teachers to improve students' academic outcomes during the traditional school day. It also gives teachers greater freedom and flexibility in their schedules. Utilizing a "best-fit" approach, teachers may choose to instruct from either 7:30am-2:30pm or 8:30am-3:30pm. Depending on the teacher's schedule, the Enrichment Block is then placed at either the beginning or end of the school day.

The Family-School Liaison

At Pulaski, Barry, and Sherman, the Family-School Liaison (FSL) Team also assists in the extended learning time schools' success by coordinating school-family-community partnerships. The FSL Team works collaboratively with students, adult family members, school staff, and community partners to identify community resources that strengthen school programs and promote social, behavioral, and academic success. The FSL Coordinator serves as the full-service community school coordinator and director of the FSL Teams.

One of the Team's contributions is the Family-School Liaison Tool, an online system that records and tracks student progress. Through this database, teachers can record students' needs daily and request additional supports; the FSL Coordinator then uses this information to coordinate services for the students. In the short run, the FSL Tool serves as an efficient and effective form of daily recordkeeping. In the long run, teachers, FSL Teams, and the FSL Coordinator use the data to remove individual barriers to learning and support student success.

Results

In comparison to other Meriden schools without the extended-day or full-service community school approach, strong results have already been achieved at Pulaski and Barry. Pulaski's attendance rates, core subject test score gains, and teachers' ratings now exceed the district-wide average. Ninety-seven percent of Pulaski students also report that their teachers are fair, caring, and effective at motivating them to learn. The district anticipates similar results at Roger Sherman Elementary this school year.

Meriden hopes to soon have half of their elementary schools operating as expanded time schools. Overall, the district hopes to foster a system where "families and communities can feel more welcome, teachers can be more creative, and students can really learn."