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Strengthening NYC Middle-Grades Learning In & Out of School: Five Recommendations to the Mayor

Partnership for After School Education

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Strengthening NYC Middle-Grades Learning In & Out of School

Five Recommendations to the Mayor

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The mandate

During the mayoral campaign, candidate Bill de Blasio lifted two initiatives to the top of New York City's education agenda: universal prekindergarten and universal access to afterschool programs for middle-grades students. His landslide election signaled a broad mandate for these initiatives.

Mayor de Blasio has committed his administration to adding enough seats to afterschool programs to accommodate every middle-grades child whose family chooses to participate. In an extended press conference held two weeks after taking office, Mayor de Blasio emphasized three key reasons to scale up afterschool programs:

1. reinforcing school-day instruction;
2. providing greater opportunity to explore and develop interests and talents in settings that support healthy development;
3. and giving working parents peace of mind as their children pass through a challenging phase.

He announced plans to scale up today's most effective afterschool programs, providing a balanced program of academic and extra-curricular activities that take into account children's developmental strengths, needs, and interests while integrating and enhancing academic skills.

Expanding learning time

On January 31, a diverse group of stakeholders met at the Ford Foundation to develop a set of recommendations to the Mayor that reflects his stated goals and at the same time considers opportunities for innovation. The meeting was convened by Bank Street College of Education, the Partnership for After School Education (PASE), and the Ford Foundation.

Participants represented practitioners, parents, afterschool program providers, academics involved in teacher/leader preparation, researchers, community activists, and experts in such allied disciplines as school building design, school-based health services, arts enrichment, and museum education.

This was a chance to ask important questions about expanding learning time for middle-grades students. How can we provide opportunities to shore up not only academic skills, but also social and emotional competence? How can we help students discover passions and push their thinking—whether in the realm of ideas, technology/design, the arts, or athletics?

More and better learning time

The Ford Foundation has supported efforts by many organizations to reimagine the school day, based on the conviction that the six-hour school day and 180-day school year common in public schools across our nation do not provide enough time to prepare young people to succeed in the 21st century.

The Foundation has proposed this definition of Expanded Learning Time, based on what is known from research and practice: *"ELT is significant additional time in the day, week and/or year, for all students in a school or grade, structured with clear goals determined by student needs as evidenced by quantitative and qualitative data."* ELT programs add 285 – 485 hours per year to state-mandated minimums, and dedicate more time to academic tasks and a balanced learning approach with new and/or expanded enrichment opportunities.

Source: Ford Foundation (May 2013). *More & Better Learning Time in New York State.* New York, NY: Author.

Participants posed more questions: How can we expand what is without narrowing our vision of what could be? How can opportunities for innovative designs and pilot programs be folded into a major scale-up effort? How can we sidestep the unintended consequences sometimes associated with rapid program expansion? How can we ensure that we are expanding "seed time" (cultivating new interests and abilities) rather than just "seat time"? And in our zeal for quality, how do we ensure that the perfect does not become the enemy of the good?

What is/What could be

Our conversation began with the recognition that today, many effective—and some inspiring—afterschool programs operate in middle-grades schools across the city. We heard about excellent models from participants representing schools, principals, CBOs, afterschool providers, and consortia of afterschool programs. Some of these are highlighted in the pages that follow.

> *"An initiative that does not address existing inequities and missed opportunities would need reform on day one."*

At the same time, participants pointed to quality gaps. They underscored that major scale-up efforts run the risk of stabilizing and spreading a set of longstanding policies, programs and practices that may not be working well for all children, families, and communities. As one participant stated, "an initiative that does not address existing inequities and missed opportunities would need reform on day one." Several expressed concern that a rapid scale-up of existing services could foreclose valuable opportunities to rethink the district's overall approach to middle-grade learning in and out of school.

A time of opportunity

It is not always easy to see the ways that beliefs influence public policy, but the effects can be far-reaching. Misconceptions about early adolescence have constrained policy and practice for generations, affecting the types and amounts of public investment aimed at supporting adolescent development and learning. In 1904, in a book called *Adolescence*, the first president of the American Psychological Association, G. Stanley Hall, popularized the view that the second decade of life is inevitably a time of turmoil and conflict, driven by raging hormones. In the decades that followed, many psychologists and educators accepted and extended Hall's emphasis on turmoil.[1]

Today, "raging hormones" continue to be a popular theme in discussions of middle school. In this framing, intense mood swings and conflict with peers and adults may be considered natural and therefore unavoidable. A one-time middle school teacher interviewed for a *This American Life* episode on middle school put it this way: "They are so consumed with learning all these other lessons about where they fit in and the social order and how their bodies are now working and who they're attracted to and who they're going to be... You're sort of wasting your time trying to teach middle school kids anything."[2]

This assumption is "not supported by scientific evidence," as the National Institutes of Health concluded in a paper on adolescent development and puberty published fifteen years ago.[3] And yet, the belief that hormone-driven young adolescents just need to be contained until they pass out of the middle grades has sometimes kept them from having the opportunities, support or help they need. If intense turmoil, even suffering, is natural and inevitable during this span, then—it follows—the best thing to do is just wait. And in this framing, afterschool is a place to keep middle-grades students sheltered, safe, and off the streets until they pass into a less tumultuous developmental phase.

To be sure, there are developmental challenges during the middle-grade years. Young adolescents grow in fits and starts, pleading for new staying-out privileges on Friday afternoon, and on Saturday morning retrieving a forgotten action figure from a closet floor. They often seem self-absorbed as they study their reflections in the bathroom mirror and relentlessly compare themselves to classmates. But at the same time, they are acutely aware of their surroundings, eager to navigate their neighborhoods and the world beyond. It is a time when kids are the real action figures: they need to move, stretch, and experiment.

After more than a century, Stanley Hall's framing has begun to shift, thanks in large measure to new research into adolescent brain development. We now know that during the middle school years, there is rapid development of the parts of the brain that allow learning and reasoning. An additional cache of neurons comes online, helping young teens meet more complex cognitive challenges. At the same time, there is a streamlining of connections that allows more efficient processing of information and ideas. In short, young teens' brainpower is increasing, their thinking is more complex, and their minds are wildly busy. They may look blasé in the company of parents or teachers, but their inner lives are anything but.

The middle-grade years are an amazing time of opportunity. It is a time when youngsters have increased capacity for seeing an issue from multiple viewpoints, for tolerating ambiguity, and for exploring the unknown.[4] It is a time when learning sticks, as any adult will realize by thinking about the knowledge and skills gained as sixth or seventh graders—dance moves, clarinet scales, sports heroes' stats, song lyrics, lines memorized for a school play.

Of course, it is not necessary to consult one's own past to appreciate the opportunities; middle graders are very articulate about their experiences.

They describe the urge to address life's big questions: who am I, why am I here, where do I belong. They are willing to question received wisdom and to reflect on emotional responses—their own and those of others.

Security, Exploration, Identity

These are years when, too often, life is interesting, but school is boring. Just as the world seems to be opening up, classroom walls may seem to be closing in. Curricula may feel constricting. Researchers report a loss of interest in school during these years. Middle-grades students want to be engaged with the world. They want chances to interact with peers and coaches in cyberspace, on playing fields, or in community groups, and these outlets hold promise for strengthening learning. But young adolescents still need schools. They need the security of a place that is theirs and of adults who know them well. They need the security that comes with a sense of belonging.

Researchers also report that middle-grade youngsters tend to lose faith in their own abilities, including their abilities as learners (APA, 2014). Kids need the confidence that comes with the chance to explore new material, to master knowledge and skills that are challenging, meaningful to them, and valued by peers. This kind of mastery requires sustained focus, something that is in short supply in the fragmented days and weeks typical of many middle schools.

Finally, as children transition to the middle grades and anticipate high school, they need help understanding and integrating multiple identities. Psychologists say that mentors and coaches play a crucial role as youngsters question and explore who they are with respect to gender, race, and ethnicity, as they solidify ideas about who they are as learners, friends, and group members, and as they develop the critical consciousness that allows them to begin defining their own convictions and commitments.[5]

In short, middle-grades learners need **security**—predictable care, safe places, familiar routines, and understanding adults. They need support for **exploration** as they come into contact with new settings, languages, ideas, and possibilities. And they need chances to consider and establish their own **identity**—as able learners, as distinct individuals, and as valued members of families and communities. This set of developmental challenges reflects a growing body of research on the middle-grade years,[6] is crucial to any effort to support learning and resilience in during this span, and should be cornerstones of policies, programs, and practices related to middle school.

Effective afterschool programs

"A decade of research and evaluation studies, as well as large-scale, rigorously conducted syntheses of many research and evaluation studies, confirms that children and youth who participate in afterschool programs can reap a host of positive academic, social, prevention and health benefits." The 2008 study by the Harvard Family Research Project that reached this conclusion also identified three factors that are critical to success:

- Access to and sustained participation in programs. Effective programs sustain participation by tailoring programs to youth interests, needs, and schedules, and exposing participants to new ideas, challenges, and people.

- Quality programming. Effective programs ensure participants' physical and psychological safety. They have effective management practices; appropriate supervision and structure; well-prepared staff; intentional programming with opportunities for autonomy and choice; and strong partnerships among schools, afterschool programs, and families.

- Strong partnerships. Effective programs develop, utilize, and leverage close partnerships with a variety of stakeholders.

Source: Priscilla M.D. Little, Christopher Wimer & Heather B. Weiss (2008). *After School Programs in the 21st Century: Their Potential and What It Takes to Achieve It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. See http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/after-school-programs-in-the-21st-century-their-potential-and-what-it-takes-to-achieve-it

Five Recommendations

Having turned a spotlight on this crucial developmental phase, the Mayor and his team now have a rare opportunity to strengthen middle-grades learning. We urge them to:

1. **Reframe middle-grades learning as a community responsibility.**
2. **Focus accountability on student learning and development in and out of school.**
3. **Strengthen middle-grades schools as centers of youth development.**
4. **Incentivize innovative designs.**
5. **Prepare and support a range of adults to foster middle-grades learning in and out of school.**

1. Reframe middle-grades learning as a community responsibility.

The UFT contract announced by Mayor de Blasio on May 1 includes measures aimed at strengthening collaboration among schools, parents, and communities. In the realm of middle-school learning, we urge the Mayor to continue this emphasis, reframing learning as a community responsibility, with parents, other community members, and community-based organizations (CBOs) working together with schools to extend opportunities for middle-grade learning. Only in this way will young people experience "surround-sound" learning throughout the day, week and year. Only in this way will they meet consistent, high expectations at home, in school, in community organizations, on the playing field, and in their neighborhoods.

> *Many New Yorkers perceive that schools belong to remote policymakers who promulgate standards and oversee assessments.*

Researchers say that today's middle-grades students would benefit from more chances to learn in the real world, where they can experience the kinds of "communities of practice" that now characterize endeavors in many disciplines.[7] This means more apprenticeships, more hands-on learning, and more collaborative projects in areas that are likely to spark passion, whether dance, environmental activism, animal care, or robotics. It means more opportunities to learn from mentors and peers.

These opportunities cannot take place without active community engagement—but for that to happen, we must ask: *whose schools are they anyway?* That public schools belong to the public may seem like a dazzling glimpse of the obvious, but the principle must be consistently articulated by the Mayor and his team. This begins with sending the clear message that our schools belong to all of us. In recent years, many New Yorkers have come to perceive that schools belong to remote policymakers who promulgate standards and oversee assessments, and this undercuts their involvement in local schooling. A cultural

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shift is needed if community members are to feel true ownership of—and responsibility for—local schools. This includes a shift in the kind of language that is used to discuss education and accountability.

- **Rethink governance to encourage community responsibility for student learning.** In recent years, principals have been encouraged to operate as individual entrepreneurs, loosely affiliated with networks and clusters but acting largely on their own. Over time, this culture could constrain the success of the Mayor's initiative. Individual middle-grades schools cannot successfully expand learning time—or enrich students' opportunities for hands-on learning—without strong community allies. New York City needs a governance structure for public schooling that values community and takes fully into account the views of parents and other local residents—including those whose voices have not held weight in policy debates. Our city has experimented with multiple governance models over the last decade, and has ended up with clusters and networks whose schools are dispersed across the five boroughs. This model may have advantages for schools that wish to ally themselves with a pedagogical approach rather than a geographical entity, but it also undercuts community responsibility for learning. It also means that partnerships with afterschool providers and CBOs are often negotiated and operated on a school-by-school basis, making scale-up more difficult. For all of these reasons, it is time to reassert the value of community schooling and rethink the ways that schools join together to meet the full range of children's educational needs.

> ## Community schooling in Cincinnati
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> "Cincinnati has a seamless integration between day and afterschool, between teachers and community-based organizations." That is how UFT Vice President Karen Alford describes the community schools she has visited in the Ohio city that has moved rapidly toward community schooling. This shift has not been a panacea for the city's educational ills, but it has been associated with significant gains in student learning and progress toward equity.
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> The approach took hold in the late 1990s, when the Ohio Supreme Court declared the public schools' achievement gap not just unconscionable, but also unconstitutional. Recognizing that teachers alone could not bolster learning for all, the city made public schools the hubs of services in their neighborhoods. Schools collaborate closely with community partners, including dental clinics, mental health professionals, and volunteer mentors from local enterprises and faith communities. Karen Alford says that NYC public schools are "doing a lot of what they're doing—clinics, tutoring — but each is a separate program." She contrasts the coherent approach to serving kids in Cincinnati to "what we're doing a lot in our classrooms, which is triage." [8]

- **Recognize the contributions and clarify the responsibilities of community partners.** As a 2013 Ford Foundation report on expanded-time learning in New York State recognized, community partners can add dimensions to the learning day that schools typically cannot achieve on their own. These organizations often provide a framework for schools to think creatively about redesigning the day to meet the needs of students and families while drawing on affordable community resources such as youth development programs, teaching artists and corporate volunteers. In a conversation that included diverse stakeholders, we heard a community representative say: "Partners in schools do not ever want to be called vendors again. Snapple is a vendor. A settlement house or an arts organization is not a vendor." We also heard school representatives say, "We want partners who are willing to change or adjust what they are doing. There is a perception that partners do all the good stuff, and schools do all the hard stuff. Schools don't get enough support to do the hard stuff." As schools and community partners join forces, both need to be accountable for student success.

- **Welcome parents and community members into the places where middle-grades children spend time.** In designing middle school learning in and out of school, the Mayor and his team can build on a progressive tradition of community schools that welcome parents and community members and provide, in partnership with CBOs, a coherent set of high-priority services or activities for them. In the aftermath of super-storm Sandy, NYC public schools served multiple community needs, with the help of volunteers, while continuing to carry out their academic missions. To be sure, that was an unusual circumstance, but it showed the powerful role that schools can serve as community centers.

- **Pilot innovative policies and practices that hold promise for strengthening the community role in schooling.** Two examples that surfaced in our conversation: Community school districts or networks, working with unions, may want to consider piloting initiatives that provide teacher housing near schools so that teachers understand and have a stronger stake in the community. They may want to consider community forums on homework—an aspect of curriculum that everyone (students, parents/guardians, afterschool providers, and school faculties) has a stake in understanding and improving.

2. Refocus accountability using definitions and measures of success that make sense for middle-grades students.

Participants called this "the elephant in the room—the issue that must be addressed if we are to make real progress in extending the school day or any other major initiative."

- **Move beyond today's overreliance on test score results.** Given accountability structures that reward test score gains, district and school leaders understandably focus investments on programs that seem likely to boost results on state exams. There is growing consensus that this must change. To strengthen learning in and out of school, middle-grades schools need definitions and measures of success that make sense for their students, based on students' developmental characteristics and society's changing demands and opportunities. In the middle-grade years, this means, in part, an accountability system that holds high expectations for every student, while allowing individuals and teams to immerse themselves in challenging, sustained projects that they have a hand in choosing and designing. As new accountability structures are developed, new measures of teacher and leader effectiveness are needed. These measures should reflect the aims of the school, the characteristics of middle-grade learners, and the capacity to support and collaborate with a range of community partners.

- **Accountability means answering to the children—and closing the quality gaps that place them at an unfair disadvantage.** A restructured accountability system must take

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equity fully into account. As things stand, children from more prosperous families are more likely to attend schools with high quality enrichment and arts activities, based on parents' ability to raise money and other resources. Some districts have addressed this inequity, for example by mandating that a portion of enrichment funds raised at a school go into a citywide enrichment fund that benefits all schools. This and other approaches need to be piloted and evaluated.

· **Ensure that community voices are represented in the work of the newly formed Children's Cabinet.** Meeting participants recognized that expanding learning time only makes sense if students have the essential resources and supports they need to benefit from additional opportunities. They therefore recommended formation of a Children's Cabinet to recognize the role of multiple agencies and partners in fostering children's well being and school success. Happily, the Mayor recently formed such a Cabinet, strengthening alignment and coordination among a wide range of city agencies responsible for responding to the needs, strengths, and interests of children. At this point, the Cabinet includes government agencies. We urge the Mayor to ensure that community voices are represented in the work of the Cabinet, and to identify the role of community partners in informing policymaking and supporting coordination efforts.

3. Strengthen middle-grades schools as centers of youth development

The Mayor has recognized that the middle-grade years pose special challenges for children and parents alike. "Getting through" has often been the emphasis. Parents and teachers have often steered kids through these years as if passing through a museum gallery— quickly pointing out treasures and hoping for as little damage as possible. It is time for a more positive approach. Participants at our meeting asked: what would the structures and schedules that define middle-grades learning look like if we focused intensely on the educational *and* developmental challenges—acknowledging the importance of security, exploration, and identity? What kinds of collaboration among government agencies and community partners would we put into place? What would the school day and school year look like? What would learning look like? Which promising models would we move from pilot to policy?

· **Recognize middle-grade students' need to experience mastery.** "First do no harm" is as essential to education as to health care, and keeping kids physically safe and free from harassment or discrimination is the first responsibility of schools. Expanding learning time for many more middle-grades children will require rethinking some safety procedures, such as screening the adults with whom students interact. At the same

time, participants urged a broader approach to security—beginning with the recognition that youngsters in this age span need the confidence and sense of agency that come from opportunities to experience themselves as leaders, advocates, and "experts."

- **Focus on transitions.** Participants urged more attention to transitions from one level of schooling to another. Effective programs, such as the Summer Bridge program, may warrant scale-up. In many cases, transitions may be eased or eliminated by restructuring schools, for example by creating more P-8 schools and eliminating middle schools. We have come to assume the importance of middle schools since they were first introduced (as junior highs) a half-century ago, but researchers now say that placing hundreds (or thousands) of young adolescents together in a building may actually have negative effects on their learning and well-being.

- **Rethink approaches to addressing the needs of disruptive students.** In many middle-grades schools, school leaders spend countless hours addressing the needs and behaviors of a small minority of disruptive students. Extended suspensions—a frequent intervention—protects schoolmates but fails to meet the learning or mental health needs of the misbehaving student. Since these suspensions disproportionately affect boys of color in our schools, they also work against the Mayor's efforts to address systematic inequity. In short, everyone would benefit from a candid acknowledgement that current approaches need to be reconsidered, and a concrete plan to do so.

- **Integrate social/emotional learning across the curriculum.** Middle-grades students tend to be intensely self-conscious, and need places to learn where they feel safe, respected, and free from fear of judgment or mockery. Participants in our conversation stressed that curricula geared to social-emotional learning strengthen rather than derail a school's core academic mission. Well-designed and tested Advisory curricula, for example, should be part of every middle school experience. Expanded-time programs may facilitate access to social workers and other mental health professionals, as well as mentors and coaches, whose preparation has included a special focus on development and learning in the middle school years.

4. Incentivize innovative designs.

The new UFT contract gives up to 200 schools the regulatory leeway needed to introduce innovation based on local preferences and needs, including variation in the way the school day is defined and organized. We urge the Mayor to extend this spirit of innovation in implementing his middle-school afterschool initiative.

- **Incorporate design competitions into the middle-grades afterschool initiative.** The Mayor has an opportunity not only to scale up today's most effective afterschool programs, but also to design and pilot innovative models. Design competitions could create incentives for networks or individual schools, collaborating with CBOs, to create and test promising models based on a well-articulated set of design principles. Selected networks or schools might receive waivers that would allow them to make creative use of school resources (including time, space, and staffing), to experiment with partnership models, or to propose accountability measures that reflect their aims and emphases. Parents and students could be given choices to opt in or out of the pilot programs. The aim is to foster variation in the system and to learn from it.

- **Reconsider school structure to maximize continuity.** Grade configuration is a lively topic of research, and many studies conclude that when hundreds of young adolescents are collected in a building and educated separately, both learning and behavior tend to suffer.[9] Participants at our meeting urged the Mayor, as a matter of policy, to encourage more P-8 schools and permit networks or schools to take steps toward joining nearby elementary and middle schools into a single entity with an upper house and lower house, with either a single school leaders or co-principals.

> *"Imagine a partnership that would bring dancers into the school to work with students during their most restless hours."*

- **Rethink the school day and year to support exploration.** This means challenging long-held assumptions about what the school day looks like and feels like. Those assumptions are grounded in ideas and tools that may have outlived their utility. The Carnegie Unit, a measure of seat time in a class over the course of a year, was identified as one of these tools. Participants brainstormed about innovative school-day strategies that emphasize exploration and opportunities to develop mastery and habits of mind. One discussion group imagined a partnership that would bring dancers into the school to work with students during their most restless hours. Another discussed a model that would include four core subjects per year, with one chosen by the student. Participants wondered how the school year could be redesigned so that summers are better used, and how administrative obstacles to such changes could be eliminated.

- **Rethink the use of and ensure that facilities convey respect for students and for learning.** In today's digital world, the workplace is not necessarily a place at all. Rather, the context for work may be a team collaborating to solve a set of problems or design a new process or product. In the education world, online learning has redefined the classroom. Participants in our conversation recognized that young adolescents continue to need a place to be—where they can feel safe and respected and enjoy a sense of belonging. However, given rapid change in the way people meet, communicate, and collaborate, shared curriculum can be experienced up in a variety of in-school and out-of-school settings, and hybrid models may be beneficial. There is good reason to begin designing, piloting, and testing alternative models.

- **Rethink partnerships.** Expanded-time programs can provide opportunities for positive relationships with diverse providers, including (but not limited to) libraries, museums, arts organizations, sports groups, local employers, unions, theaters, and social service agencies. They allow students to form positive relationships not only with teachers and coaches but also with social workers, youth developers, and others. Organizations that focus on mentorship, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, have addressed some of the issues involved with such partnerships, such as screening adult participants, and schools may be able to benefit from their experience.

- **Address the technical challenges that often impede innovation.** Participants recognized that new designs and models require attention to the way that contracts and funding are structured. In particular, it was noted that out-of-school-time grants do not usually pay for school-time integration. Participants discussed ways to level the playing field for under-resourced schools, including a formula by which the city would make investments in enrichment activities keyed to CBO investments.

5. Prepare and support a range of adults to foster middle-grades learning in and out of school.

Scaling up middle-grades afterschool opportunities means involving a significant number of adults who have not previously worked with such programs. The initiative will blur boundaries between classroom and extra-curricular learning, calling upon leaders, teachers, afterschool providers, and community members to acquire new understandings and skills, make decisions collaboratively, work together, and learn from each other. Our final set of recommendations pursues this aim.

- **Rethink preparation and professional development for a wide range of adult roles.** The planned scale-up will bring new cadres of staff (and volunteers) into the schools to facilitate partnerships and to teach, mentor, and coach middle-grade students. There is a consequent need for professional development geared to supporting learning in and out of school. A number of approaches need to be considered, including support for leaders of schools and CBOs as they establish or extend partnerships; mentorship training and credentialing; and specific preparation for leading middle-grade Advisories. All professional development should focus on increasing understanding of how young adolescents learn and develop; collaborating across cultural and organizational boundaries; and designing and planning new approaches to expanded-time learning. Finding time for professional development is always challenging, and as school schedules are reconfigured, opportunities to fold PD into the school day should be pursued.

- **Encourage opportunities for schools and CBOs to organize joint professional**

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development. Planning and holding collaborative PD sessions can strengthen collaboration and, where organizational cultures and language differ, help to build consensus around goals and strategies.

- Consider new leadership configurations. Scaling up expanded-time programs will mean additional roles and responsibilities for middle-grades principals, including forging new or extended relationships with community agencies and organizations, and seizing opportunities for design and innovation. To a greater extent than ever before, principals will need to cultivate relationships with all of the organizations and adults who contribute to kids' lives. Many principals already wonder whether their jobs are "doable" —despite the long days that most already devote to their schools. School leadership may need rethinking, especially as new designs are piloted and tested. The co-principalship (currently permitted only in charter schools) is an avenue that needs to be explored. This model may work especially well when elementary and middle schools combine, or when a lead community organization plays a major role in a school's design and/or day-to-day life. The assistant principal (AP) role may also need rethinking. Chancellor Fariña has signaled that New York City will be selecting, as new principals, more experienced educators. This may mean that promising leaders will spend more time in AP positions, and can play key roles in planning and implementing expanded-time programs as well as community partnerships. They will need preparation and support for these roles.

- Press for changes in NY State certification that will ensure teachers in the middle grades are prepared for the specific developmental and learning characteristics **of their students.** Middle-grade teachers need to have appropriate preparation in their content-area, but they also need to have specific preparation related to the developmental challenges and learning characteristics associated with the middle grades.

Conclusion

By making middle-grades afterschool a top priority, the de Blasio administration has turned a spotlight on early adolescence is a time of risk and opportunity. To ensure the long-term success and sustainability of his important initiative, we urge the Mayor to consider these five recommendations. We believe that taken together, these recommendations can strengthen the initiative and lead to models of expanded learning time that can be adapted by districts across the nation. Most importantly, we believe these recommendations can help to ensure that young adolescents in our schools and communities are confident, curious, unstoppable learners, today and tomorrow.

Notes

[1] National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (1999). *Risks and opportunities: A synthesis of research on adolescence.* Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, p. 9.

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[5] American Psychological Association (2008) *Resilience in African American children and adolescents: A vision for optimal development.* Washington, DC: APA Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/resiliencerpt.pdf; Dianda, M.R. (2008). Preventing future high school dropouts: An advocacy and action guide for NEA state and local affiliates. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

[6] See, for example, Halpern, R., Heckman, P., & Larson, R. (2013), *Realizing the potential of learning in middle adolescence.* http://www.howyouthlearn.org/pdf/Realizing%20the%20Poential%20of%20Learning%20in%20Middle%20Adolescence.pdf.

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[9] Jacob, B.A. & Rockoff, J.E. (2011). *Organizing schools to improve student achievement: Start times, grade configurations, and teacher assignments.* Washington, DC: Brookings/The Hamilton Project.