

It's **About TIME**

Planning Interventions and Extensions in Secondary School

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Foreword by Richard DuFour

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Introduction: Harnessing the Power of Time

Mike Mattos and Austin Buffum

Time. It waits for no one, flies when you are having fun, and heals all wounds. Just a stitch of it saves nine. It can be raced against, borrowed, wasted, and served. It may be ripe, due, on your hands, and on your side. You can have a whale of it, yet when you have much to do, have so little.

In the world of education, these common idioms about time hold true. In the United States, the average student spends thirteen years and approximately fifteen thousand hours of time at school from kindergarten through high school—a boatload of time. Yet, with the staggering amount of required curriculum that must be taught each year, teachers are faced with a daunting reality: so much to teach, so little time.

At the secondary level, this time crunch is multiplied exponentially by the expectation that schools not only teach mandatory curriculum but also offer college coursework for students who are accelerating, remediation work for skills that students should have already mastered, and enrichment through extracurricular opportunities in athletics, the arts, community service, clubs, and social activities—a seemingly infinite number of demands expected in a finite amount of time. Because adequate time is an essential variable in the formula of learning, this dilemma has a profound impact on both students and educators.

The Importance of Time to Student Learning

It is commonly said that in this world, nothing can be certain except for death and taxes. In the education world, we have our own two universal truths.

1. **Every student does not learn the same way:** Every student has unique learning needs, based on his or her prior knowledge and

experiences, cultural values, learning styles, and aptitudes. Due to these differences, no matter how well a teacher teaches a concept, we know some students won't get it the first time, because the best way to teach a concept to one student might fail miserably with another in the same class.

2. **Every student does not develop at the same speed:** We know that there are spans of time in which students mature, both physically and intellectually. Some of these developmental spans, such as the period in which students start to show the physical changes of puberty, can be quite significant—it is not uncommon for a high school classroom to have a boy still waiting for his growth spurt sitting next to a fellow classmate who is a foot taller and already shaving. Less visible to the eye, but just as age-appropriate and extreme, are the differences in which adolescents develop intellectually and socially. Just as a group of boys won't develop the need to shave at the same speed or on the same day, secondary school students will not acquire the ability to solve abstract equations or display empathy at the same speed.

If we condense these two universal truths into a simple formula to ensure student learning, the equation would look like this (Bloom, 1968; Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012; Guskey & Pigott, 1988):

$$\text{Targeted Instruction} + \text{Time} = \text{Learning}$$

If a school can make both teaching and time variables in this equation and target them to meet each student's individual learning and developmental needs, the school is more likely to achieve high levels of learning for every student.

For any school dedicated to ensuring that all students learn at high levels, making the time to meet each student's varying learning needs is a critical consideration. Achieving this goal would be much easier if the U.S. education system was purposely designed around this outcome. Unfortunately, our traditional secondary model of education is not only misaligned to this goal but purposefully designed to make time a rigid constant for all students, since the goal was not high levels of learning for all students but success for a select few.

The Original Purpose of Secondary Education

We should hardly be surprised that our traditional secondary school practices fail to make teaching and time variables, as the original purpose of secondary education in America was for only a small number of students to attend and for even fewer

to graduate. High schools were established in the late 1800s as selective institutions, “catering to the relatively few students who had the interest and the means to attend school after the primary grades” (Rumberger, 2011, p. 21). As stated by Harvard University president Charles Eliot in 1893:

The main function (of high school) is to prepare for the duties of life that small proportion of all the children in the country—a proportion small in number, but very important to the welfare of the nation—who show themselves able to profit by an education prolonged to the eighteenth year, and whose parents are able to support them while they remain in school so long. (Dorn, 1996, p. 36)

This philosophy became a reality. In 1900, only 14 percent of children fourteen to seventeen years old attended high school (Rumberger, 2011).

While the percentage of America’s youth attending high school increased dramatically throughout the first half of the 20th century, the predominant view of secondary school as a selective process remained. In his widely cited 1959 book *The American High School Today*, former Harvard president James Bryant Conant argued for all students to attend high school but proposed the curriculum be differentiated to prepare students for diverse futures—some for advanced schooling and some for the workplace (Rumberger, 2011). In such a system, students are sorted into tracks based primarily on their perceived ability and prior academic success. Students deemed to have greater academic potential are placed in higher tracks designed to prepare them for college, while students placed in lower tracks prepare to immediately enter a vocational trade after high school. If a student struggled in the higher track, the solution in most cases was not to provide additional time and support but instead to lower the student’s academic expectations and demote him or her to a lower track.

While some might argue that this selective approach to secondary education was partially driven to maintain class elitism, there was an undeniable economic reality to this design. A vast majority of Americans either farmed or worked in factories throughout the 20th century—careers that rarely required a high school diploma or college degree. If we were still preparing a majority of students for the labor-driven professions of the 20th century, this traditional model would be ideal. But time stands still for no one.

The Brutal Facts

Drastic economic changes driven by global competition and technological advances require us to rethink and revise our fundamental purpose and practices in secondary education. Consider the following characteristics of the 21st century U.S. economy.

- Less than 1 percent of the population directly farms for a living, and less than 10 percent work in factories (Hagenbaugh, 2002; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Utah State University Extension, & LetterPress Software, n.d.).
- According to the U.S. Department of Labor, nearly two-thirds of the new jobs created between 2006 and 2016 will be in occupations that require postsecondary education or considerable on-the-job training, while jobs requiring routine manual tasks will continue to decrease (Chao, 2008).
- Among traditional blue-collar trades, higher levels of academic preparation will be a prerequisite for employment. For example, the nonprofit organization ACT (2006) examines the mathematics and reading skills required for electricians, construction workers, upholsterers, and plumbers and concludes they match what's necessary to do well in a first-year college course.
- Wages for careers that require higher levels of education and training will outpace nondegreed jobs, with the average college graduate earning 77 percent more than the typical high school graduate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008).

Educators commonly say that it is our job to prepare students for the real world. Well, the stats we've just listed are the real world. In our current global economy, there is virtually no pathway to the middle class that does not require a postsecondary education—anything less is a one-way ticket to poverty. As the American Diploma Project (2004) states:

Successful preparation for both postsecondary education and employment requires learning the same rigorous English and mathematics content and skills. No longer do students planning to work after high school need a different and less rigorous curriculum than those planning to go to college. In fact, nearly all students will require some postsecondary education, including on-the-job training, after completing high school. Therefore, a college and workplace readiness curriculum should be a graduation requirement, not an option, for all high school students. (pp. 8–9)

Restructuring education to meet 21st century needs has been the driving force behind many educational reform initiatives. From block scheduling and advisory periods to starting the school year earlier so there is more instructional time prior to the high-stakes tests given each spring, a majority of reforms have focused primarily on revising the secondary master schedule and calendar. While these reforms have reallocated instructional time, they have failed to realize significant gains in student achievement, primarily because most schools continue the practice of tracking.