

# Can The National Center on Time & Learning Bring Longer Schools Days to One Million Students?

Steven H. Goldberg 04 April 2011

**"We still have a hideously dysfunctional public education system, one that has mastered the art of manufacturing dropouts and functional illiterates. We have not even begun to turn that around."**

**Bob Herbert, "Stacking the Deck Against Kids," *New York Times*, November 28, 2009**

## Summary

After decades of devising effective solutions to seemingly intractable problems, social entrepreneurship is ready for the next major challenge: making the most promising innovations available to many more people, that is, "scaling what works." The National Center on Time & Learning was launched for the sole purpose of dramatically increasing the number of extended-day schools across the country. This article critically examines NCTL's audacious goals and its strategy for achieving them.

On October 2, 2007, a distinguished group of education policy and foundation leaders joined members of Congress in Washington, D.C., to announce the launch of the National Center on Time & Learning. NCTL is an ambitious initiative designed to make adoption of extended learning time (ELT) — “initiatives that add more school time for academic and enrichment opportunities to help all children meet the demands of the 21st Century” — a national priority. The announcement marked a new phase in the decades-long climb toward enlarging the typical American school day, week and year beyond the 6.5-hour, Monday through Friday, September to June boundaries established in the nineteenth century to accommodate the needs of agrarian families working outside without the benefit of electric light.

What makes NCTL particularly noteworthy is its single-minded focus on expanding the growth of high-performing programs as an essential means of transforming public education:

“NCTL’s vision is that in ten years at least one million children in high poverty communities will attend schools that have redesigned their school day to expand learning time and a majority of schools with this new school design will cut the achievement gap at least in half. By offering students a more engaging and well-rounded educational experience, these ELT schools will also significantly reduce the drop-out rates of low-income students and build non-cognitive skills such as perseverance,

teamwork, and leadership that are critical to students' long-term educational and employment success. Furthermore, in ten years redesigned schools with longer school days and years will be well on the way to becoming the norm, not an experiment, in American education."

Only schools that meet NCTL's definition of "an Expanded Learning Time (ELT) School" will count toward the goal of enrolling one million students:

- "Offers all students in a school an expanded schedule (at least 300 additional hours across the school year);
- Volunteers to add time to the school schedule and conducts an inclusive planning process (e.g. involving teachers, unions, parents, school partners) to design the new school day/year;
- Offers students a well-rounded, balanced education with the added time dedicated to more core academic time, additional enrichment programming (e.g. arts, music, apprenticeships, physical education) and time for teachers to plan, meet together, and participate in professional development;
- Is funded by the state to implement the expanded schedule for all students." (Expanded Learning Time Principles)

The U.S. Department of Education recently identified "increased learning time" as one of six priority areas for

schools competing in the "Race to the Top Fund," using a similar definition:

"Increased learning time means using a longer school day, week, or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for (a) instruction in core academic subjects, including English; reading or language arts; mathematics; science; foreign languages; civics and government; economics; arts; history; and geography; (b) instruction in other subjects and enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, including, for example, physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities that are provided by partnering, as appropriate, with other organizations; and (c) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects."

NCTL affords a particularly compelling case study of a successful innovation that has grown, after years of patient development by educators, policymakers and funders, to a level of scale such that it is now poised for rapid and widespread national expansion. Considering the track record of ELT schools to date and the expansion strategy proposed by NCTL, it is possible to offer informed assessments about the prospects for achieving the goal of one million students participating in a longer and richer school day within a decade.

# Leveraging Success

## Leveraging Success

NCTL's vision resembles that of other social entrepreneurs hoping that "one day ... all children ..." will benefit from "disruptive [or catalytic] innovations." (Kopp, Wendy, 2001). But despite impressive gains in the last two decades in the development of social innovations that are demonstrably more effective than the status quo, even the very best nonprofits fall well short of both the "one day" and "all children" goals when it comes to making those innovations available to the millions of people who need them.

For example, Teach For America, founded in 1990, serves about 450,000 students annually out of the more than 13 million who suffer "educational inequity." After more than 15 years, College Summit reaches just over 18,000 high school students each year compared to the target population of 200,000. Another 15-year old, Jumpstart for Young Children, introduces approximately 13,000 pre-schoolers to the world of books each year out of 13 million children who enter kindergarten unprepared to learn. In fact, after ten years of growth, the entire portfolios of New Profit, Inc. and the charter schools supported by the New Schools Venture Fund, both launched in 1999, benefit roughly 1.4 million and 75,000 people, respectively.

This is not a track record of failure. To the contrary, an

informed understanding of how innovation takes root and spreads strongly suggests that after some two decades of development, social entrepreneurship has grown through its infancy and adolescence, and stands on the verge of young adulthood, ready to build “enduring American institutions” (Teach For America, “Growth Plan) that are capable of producing transformative social change. Encouraging signs are everywhere.

The *New York Times* recently described two new grant programs of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation totaling \$335 million as “a rethinking of the foundation’s education strategy, previously focused largely on smaller grants intended to remake troubled American high schools. With these new, larger grants, the foundation is seeking to transform teacher management policies in four cities in hopes that innovations can spread.” (Dillon, Sam 2009).

On October 22, 2009, the Growth Philanthropy Network, Duke University and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation announced the creation of the Social Impact Exchange, “a first-of-its-kind collaboration of philanthropic funders, practitioners, researchers and others designed to make it easier for top-performing social programs to expand widely to communities that need them.” (Social Impact Exchange, 2009). The Exchange’s “investment clearinghouse” is a “platform for financing high-impact nonprofit initiatives,” several of which were nominated by groundbreaking growth-capital intermediaries such as NFF Capital Partners and

Seachange Capital Partners. (Social Impact Exchange, 2009)

For the first time, the White House has signed on with the unveiling of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a \$50 million federal investment included in the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act that “will work with the grantmaking community to fund promising nonprofits that have demonstrated outcomes ... with growth funding and other support to scale and spread their impact.” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2009). The SIF, which originated as a policy proposal of the America Forward coalition sponsored by New Profit, complements other federal stimulus and budget programs to nurture the growth of social sector innovations whose expansion could help advance federal and state governmental objectives.

All of these developments point toward an emerging consensus about the imperative of expanding social innovation. In April, 2009, the leaders of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the Bridgespan Group published a thoughtful paper entitled, “Scaling What Works: Implications for Philanthropists, Policymakers, and Nonprofit Leaders,” (Roob and Bradach, 2009) which offers astute observations about the challenges of spreading innovation:

**"REAL-WORLD INSIGHTS INTO TAKING  
NONPROFITS TO SCALE**

- Distinguishing promising programs from proven ones is complicated, costly and essential.
- Scaling requires rethinking traditional patterns of funding.
- Scaling a nonprofit's programs without investing in its capacity is a recipe for failure.
- Ongoing research, evaluation and performance measurement are imperative as an organization scales.

## **A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PHILANTHROPY**

- Philanthropy and government share responsibility for identifying programs that work and ensuring they are implemented with fidelity.
- Government and philanthropy must clarify their different and complementary roles in funding nonprofits."

As we think about what it will take for social entrepreneurship to advance to the next stage of maturation, this is an opportune time to ask ourselves whether we've indulged in wishful thinking about how social change happens. How realistic have we been about what it will take to expand innovation far beyond current levels of "market penetration"? (See sidebar, "A Word About Terminology.")

Conventional wisdom often assumes that there is some

alchemical process by which social innovation and perseverance gather momentum to reach a “tipping point” that becomes self-sustaining and transformative. One version of this thought process envisions social entrepreneurship as a laboratory that produces and nurtures seedlings of innovation, which enlightened government agencies then adopt and fund to make them available universally:

“The good news is that a small number of organizations like NFP [Nurse-Family Partnership] exist that have evidence of powerful results and that are ready to be scaled reasonably quickly. It will not be easy, and surely not all efforts will succeed, but these organizations have the staff, systems and strategies that instill confidence that the models can produce results at significant scale.

So what is missing now? The funding — structured in the right way — that will enable these programs to reach those in need. Leveraging what private philanthropy has nurtured, government can play a critical role in enabling organizations to achieve their full potential impact.” (Roob and Bradach, 2009)

This paper contends that an important link in the chain of social progress has been overlooked in these discussions, and that the right kind of money deployed in the right way is necessary but not sufficient to drive game-changing expansion of growth-ready nonprofits. It is, however, a sign of the tremendous advancement social

entrepreneurship has made that the time is finally ripe to examine this next growth stage in a more realistic way.

Two conclusions are offered. First, an incremental approach — in which handfuls or a few dozen schools at a time are invited, one after the other in endless succession, to adopt the NCTL model based on a per-student governmental funding formula — is likely to fall well short of the goal. Second, an exponential approach supported by growth-capital funding from public and private sources, including foundations and other institutional funders, can reach one million students within ten years. To be successful, multi-million dollar, multi-year grants must be made to sizable market segments of large urban school districts that are sufficient to cover both the costs of the ELT programs themselves, *as well the costs of mitigating the related “adoption risks” needed to ameliorate the inevitable disruptions of converting many schools at once to a completely redesigned extended-day program.*

Incremental growth — “onesies and twosies” (Anderson, 2006)— cannot produce social transformation within a reasonable period of time. NCTL needs a growth strategy that will make it as painless and orderly as possible for hundreds of schools to adopt ELT at once.

## **The Promise of Extended Learning Time**

## **The Promise of Extended Learning**

# Time

Extended learning time is one of four core innovations likely to comprise the essential building blocks of a more effective public school system, the other three being universal pre-K, college access and workforce development (Jumpstart). ELT is distinguished in at least one respect: it was the only one of the five major recommendations contained in the seminal 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, that has not been widely adopted:

"We recommend that significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year." (Time, *A Nation at Risk*, 1983).

More than fifty studies suggest that "(1) quality afterschool programs improved school attendance, engagement in learning, test scores, and grades; (2) frequency and duration of afterschool participation increases benefits; and (3) high-risk youth show the greatest benefits." (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2009). But while the benefits of ELT *programs* are reasonably clear, the same cannot be said for ELT *schools*, for the simple reason that, with only about 1,000 ELT schools among the 99,000 U.S. schools, "the research on expanded time schools is still quite sparse." As a result, "a number of expanded learning time schools can not show student or school improvement based solely

on adequate yearly progress or even state assessments." (Mass, 2020).

So ELT schools might well have the potential to help transform ineffective public education systems at a time of desperate need for significant improvement. But ELT advocates confront a Catch-22: the shortage of participating schools contributes to the slow adoption of extended learning time, which cements the research gap that makes others district leaders hesitant about undertaking such a high-stakes experiment. How, then, can NCTL address this chicken-and-egg problem and realize its vision that "in ten years redesigned schools with longer school days and years will be well on the way to becoming the norm, not an experiment, in American education"?

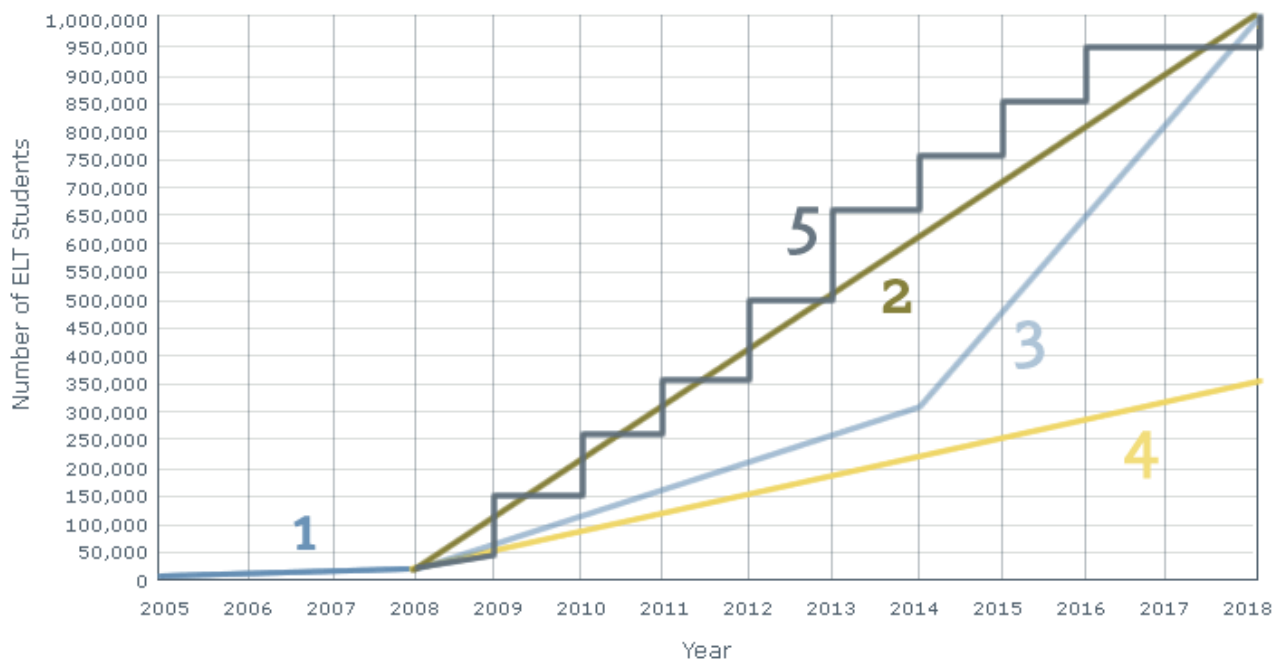
NCTL is the newest and most ambitious bearer of the ELT flag that was first flown in 2000 under the banner of the Massachusetts 2020 Foundation ("Mass 2020"), a nonprofit founded by Chris Gabrieli, a civic and business entrepreneur, and Jennifer Davis, former Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of Education, for the purpose of expanding educational and economic opportunities for children and families across the Commonwealth. Related state initiatives include the After-School for All Partnership (with Boston Public Schools), the After-School Literacy Coaching Initiative, the Middle School Initiative (with Citizen Schools), Partners for Student Success (also with BPS), Keeping Kids on Track

(with United Way organizations), and the School Sites Initiative (with The Boston Foundation and eleven public and private funders). (Rocha, 2008). Mr. Gabrieli is the author (with Warren Goldstein) of *Time to Learn: How a New School Schedule is Making Smarter Kids, Happier Parents, and Safer Neighborhoods* (Jossey-Bass 2008). The Massachusetts ELT Initiative has made impressive progress in its first three years of operation, reaching some 13,500 students and \$17.5 million in funding for an average cost per student of about \$1,300 (see Figure 1).

	2005	2006	2007
No. of Students	Increased Nos.	% Increase	N
0			0
4,900	4,900		100%
9,100	4,200	86%	183%
13,500	4,400	48%	275%

Figure 1. Massachusetts ELT Growth, 2005-2008.

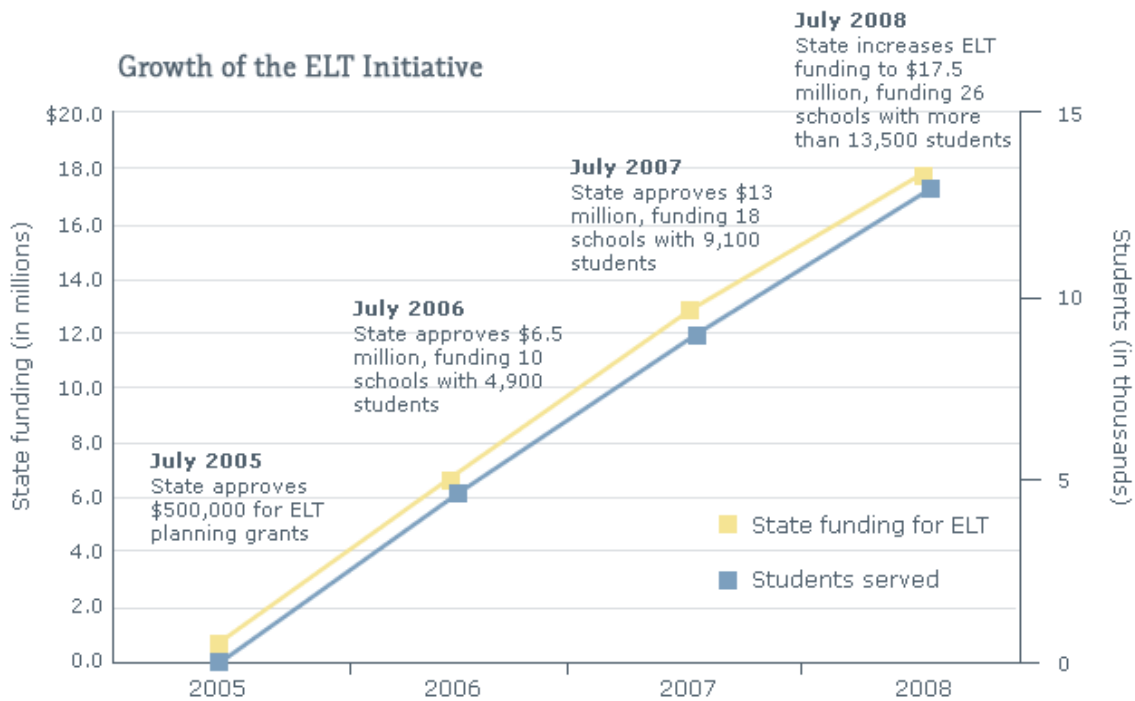
Over such a relatively short duration, annual growth rates in the second and third years of 86% and 48%, respectively, show steep growth curves (see Figure 2).



However, when 2005-2008 actual growth is compared to the targeted growth objective of one million students in the next decade, the slope of the curve looks considerably flatter (Figure 3, line 1). If we plot a constant growth curve representing roughly 100,000 more students in each of the next ten years (the first year would be 100,000 minus the 2008 actual enrollment of 13,500 students, or 86,500), we can see that a pronounced — and unlikely — increase in the rate of growth over the entire decade would be required (Figure 3, line 2). A less extreme growth rate for, say, six years, would require an even more extreme rate in the last four years to reach one million (Figure 3, line 3). Finally, if the growth rate were higher than the actual rates of 2005-2008, but not quite so unrealistically higher, the ten-year total would fall well short of one million (Figure 3, line 4).

Of course, an annual increase of 100,000 or even 50,000 students would require a remarkable surge over 2008's

actual enrollment of 13,500. Sustaining such an increase for the entire decade (line 2) or exceeding it for some substantial number of years (line 3) seems that much less likely. The most likely outcome appears to be a failure to reach the one million mark, if we constrain optimistic scenarios to more realistic limits (line 4).



What makes it so difficult to achieve such a worthwhile but challenging goal? After all, NCTL's one-million target, however daunting it might be, hardly solves the problem of underperforming U.S. schools. The answer is found in the promise and risk of innovation.

## The Anatomy of Growth

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Innovation and growth are often confused and even

conflated, but they are separate processes and the former does not inevitably lead to the latter. Lines 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 3 bring to

mind the famous “hockey stick” growth curves — flat revenues that suddenly and inexplicably ratchet sky-ward — churned out by aspiring technology entrepreneurs with illusory business models that caused so many venture capitalists to roll their eyes during the Internet boom. Such optimistic projections, even when they were sometimes justified, represent the promise of what Harvard Business School’s Clayton Christensen first dubbed “disruptive innovation” — technological advances with game-changing potential — and, later, in the context of social entrepreneurship, “catalytic innovation.” (Christensen, 2003).

Such innovations are disruptive (or catalytic) because they have the potential of producing “discontinuous” rather than just incremental growth. Examples of disruptive technologies include

refrigerators and desktop publishing; examples of catalytic social innovations include Grameen Bank’s microloans and KickStart’s manual irrigation pumps that are simple, affordable and durable.

But innovation is just the starting point for accelerated growth; its culmination depends on what happens after the innovated product is developed in the lab, so to speak,

and introduced into the marketplace. As Professor Christensen put it, "disruption does not guarantee success: It just helps with an important element in the total formula." After all, Grameen's Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize 25 years after he founded the bank that launched the microfinance revolution and it took KickStart some 17 years to develop and sell 100,000 pumps.

Extensive research and field experience demonstrate that growth of innovation occurs in three stages. In the first stage, the product itself is developed and sold to a small group of adventuresome customers aptly named "innovators." (Moore, 2009). That is, innovative products are first tried by innovative customers who are exceptionally forward-thinking and risk-tolerant. They see the transformative potential of the product and understand that they need to help co-develop it to create a working prototype. Most innovations don't change the world, but that doesn't deter innovator-customers from being the first in line to try something new that just might shake things up.

In the case of ELT, the innovative customers were the first handfuls of schools that experimented with full-day schedules, tried out different curricula and enrichment activities, and restructured the working hours and roles of teachers, administrators and volunteers. Innovative sellers such as Mass 2020 marketed ELT to these intrepid schools by making a compelling case that more school

time “well used” could catapult academic and social performance.

In the second stage, Mass 2020 leveraged those few case studies to convince a somewhat larger group of “early adopter” customers that ELT wasn’t just an interesting lab experiment, but one that could produce real value for failing schools across the country that were facing great difficulty in providing an effective education to their disadvantaged students. At this point in its development, ELT was becoming a “business solution” that had been implemented with some encouraging results, and Mass 2020 devoted major efforts to make it easier for more schools to make the difficult transition to longer school days.

For example, it published a six-part online “Guide for ELT Planning and Redesign” (The Massachusetts 2020) as “a tool to assist superintendents, principals, teachers, union leaders, school partners, parents, and others in thinking through the complexities that will arise through the redesign process, and to provide some productive ways to overcome any challenges that may occur along the way.” (See sidebar, “Mass 2020’s ‘Guide to ELT Planning and Redesign’”). Lest we lose sight of the extensive restructuring the sponsors had in mind, the authors note that,

“These six areas are highly interdependent and overlapping — they are not chronological phases of work.

Therefore, schools planning for ELT should review all six sections before getting started and move back and forth between sections throughout the process."

In stage two, not only had Mass 2020 enhanced its product offering to simplify its adoption by more schools, but the marketing message changed as well. To achieve growth beyond the small number of "innovators" that volunteered to serve as guinea pigs for embryonic ELT programs, the sponsors understood they needed to, first, anticipate the planning, communication, workforce, financial, and logistical concerns that new customers would have about redesigning their schools days and, second, proactively develop solutions to those concerns. So instead of simply talking about the benefits of ELT, Mass 2020 now engaged prospective customers on overcoming the difficult conversion challenges that schools would inevitably encounter.

To recap NCTL's journey thus far, Mass 2020 developed a disruptive innovation and convinced risk-tolerant customers that it had a good chance of working, i.e., improving student achievement. Stage 1 thus created the conditions for *potential growth*. With initial successes under its belt, Mass 2020 then enhanced the product by making planning and implementation easier and more reliable, and convinced new schools that the disruptive effects to ongoing operations were manageable. Stage 2 thus created the conditions for *incremental growth*.

NCTL was launched in the well-founded belief that ELT has now progressed to the verge of an inflection point. But it is far too commonplace for social entrepreneurs with impressive track records of innovation to fall short of their grand visions of producing social transformation. NCTL offers the rare case in which the desire for growth might actually be matched with the capacity to make it happen. Still, several questions arise:

- Can NCTL simply enhance its stage 2 efforts to gain momentum and increase the rate of adoption by new school customers, as depicted in lines 2 or 3 of Figure 3 to reach one million students in 10 years?
- Is it more likely that enhancing its existing strategy will produce some gains but well short of its vision, as shown in line 4?
- If so, is a new growth strategy needed to achieve NCTL's new vision?

## **\* Assessing NCTL's Expansion Strategy**

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Consider what it will take to dramatically shift ELT growth trajectories from the gently increasing slope of Figure 3, line 4 to the much sharper inclines of lines 2 and 3. Both pathways to one million students require NCTL to jump immediately from its 2008 recruitment of 13,500 students to somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 students each year, representing annual growth rates in the range

of 370% to 740%. At a time of unprecedented stress in public education, such dramatic increases are highly improbable.

If we generously assume that ELT schools each serve an average of 750 students (per Figure 1, the actual average for 2008 was 519), NCTL would need to enlist about 67 additional schools to reach 50,000 students and twice that many for 100,000, as compared to the 26 schools in hand so far. (NCTL states that some 40 additional schools were actively working on ELT schedules for 2009.) If the average students per school were closer to 500, the number of schools needed would rise by one-third.

Now consider the high-stakes decision facing each one of those 100 schools. In *Time to Learn*, Gabrieli and Goldstein offer a dozen lessons learned about "strong designs for new day schools": (1) voluntary participation for schools; (2) mandatory participation for students; (3) whole school redesign; (4) significantly expanded time; (5) clear academic focus; (6) well-rounded education; (7) data-driven continuous quality improvement; (8) time for teach collaboration, planning, and professional development; (9) individualization; (10) time for up-front planning; (11) partnerships with outside resources; and (12) starting with individual schools, building for scale (Gabrieli and Goldstein).

Now, this is precisely the kind of comprehensive and responsible guidance that potential ELT school leaders

need to make informed decisions. At the same time, these twelve lessons clearly show just how heavy a lift ELT represents. Indeed, NCTL developed a “technical assistance” calendar that allots 19 months just for planning the conversion to extended-day schooling (Technical Assistance Program for Massachusetts Districts and Schools Expanding Learning Time). Look at how far most underperforming schools are from just three of NCTL’s more labor-and resource-intensive principles:

- *“Redesign vs. Tack On.”* A policy that calls for “redesigning” a school day (and ideally the year, too) is the preferable approach to just adding additional time at the end of the school day. Just adding an extra hour (or a few days) to the school day/year will likely not have the desired impact. This school redesign process includes a thoughtful review of how time is currently being used and what student data shows the needs are.
- *Time and Support to Plan.* Significant planning time, ideally with the help of a facilitator/support organization, is needed for districts and schools to thoughtfully add time. Ideally, the process would be inclusive and involve the teachers, administrators, and school partners who will be responsible for implementing the new school day/year.
- *Balanced, Three-Pronged Programming.* To promote student engagement and ensure students have access to a well-rounded education, the additional

time should include not just more core academic time, but also expanded enrichment opportunities. Also, expanded teacher planning and professional development time should be a key aspect of the new school day/year." (Rocha).

It seems highly unlikely that NCTL can simply expand its ongoing efforts and expect that two to three times as many schools will decide to undertake this exceptionally difficult slog, much less do so year after year for ten years. For one thing, as shown in Figure 2, there's a fairly linear relationship between funding and student enrollment, with an average cost-per-student of roughly \$1,300. Although some efficiencies might be available, it would be more difficult to find savings by, for example, spreading fixed costs over a larger base of schools, if only a few schools are brought into the fold at a time.

At a \$1,300 price-point, 50,000 students would cost a total of \$65 million, or roughly \$1 million for each of the 67 or so new schools. As the Center for American Progress has observed, "it will be hard for districts to increase their total budgets by 5 percent to 16 percent for all schools, or even all high-poverty schools." (Roza and Miles, 2008).

Even with the prospect of supplemental federal funding at some point down the road, finding that kind of money from public school budgets inevitably will lengthen NCTL's sales cycle.

For another, NCTL is likely to find itself spread

increasingly thin as it looks to grow the ETL schools network. As of November 2009, Mass 2020 and NCTL had a “combined operating budget of \$3.6 million and a combined (and growing) staff of nearly 20.” (National Center on Time & Learning). If it costs that much to attract 26 schools, won’t the budget and staffing requirements at least double if NCTL aims for 67 schools following the same model of directly recruiting new schools one or a few at a time? One hesitates to project the cost and staff that would be needed to achieve the growth rates depicted as lines 2 or 3 of Figure 3. If the current average of approximately 500 students per school were maintained, NCTL would have to find some 2,000 new schools to reach 1 million students. That would take a lot of NCTL troops.

To their credit, the enlightened founders of the ELT movement appear to recognize the unforgiving math of incremental growth. Under the heading “Starting with Individual Schools, Building for Scale,” authors Gabrieli and Goldstein acknowledge that what got them here probably won’t get them where they want to go by the time they want to arrive:

“We advocate rolling out the new school day by starting with individual schools that want to put it to work, have a good plan to do so, and have the capacity to execute a plan. But we also believe it’s crucial that the new day strategy move beyond the one-of-a-kind, pioneering, experimental-school world into large-scale use....Under

the Massachusetts law, districts must apply with their schools and must highlight how converting one or a few schools can lead to district-wide gains. Some of the initial districts are now considering changing all their schools, or at least all the elementary and middle schools, to the new day schedule. This would greatly simplify many things, ranging from contracts with employees and bus companies to the expectations of children and parents, and would eliminate the risk of conflict between those that have more time and those that don't. It would also address issues such as what time extracurricular activities and town sports should start. We encourage policymakers to think about the long-term goal even while beginning the new school day on a more limited scale." (Gabrieli and Goldstein).

This perceptive thinking hints at a third stage beyond Stage 1, the development of innovation, and Stage 2, incremental growth, that will be required to put ELT schooling "on the way to becoming the norm, not an experiment, in American education."

## **Exponential Growth**

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NCTL and its predecessors and partners have done an exemplary job of refining their innovative product and marketing it to schools that were eager to restructure themselves in the hopes that extended learning would

contribute to meaningful reform and drastically improved performance. Undoubtedly, there are many more such schools (albeit not 2,000) that could follow exactly the same path with NCTL's help.

But if NCTL really wants to achieve its vision of one million students in ten years, the same path won't be enough. Having accomplished the first and second growth stages, it is time for NCTL to consider more aggressively what an "all schools" model would look like. Such a new approach — "exponential growth" — would be different in kind, and not just in degree, from incremental growth.

Mass 2020's innovation sprang from its insight that simple after-school and summer programs, no matter how good they might be, could not bring about the transformative benefits of redesigning the entire school day to offer much more bountiful academic and enrichment programming within a longer day. After successfully developing a workable and reliable model for ELT design, they focused on making it as simple as possible for motivated schools to convert to extended schedules without having to reinvent the same wheel. But the mathematics of incremental growth now press upon NCTL to make a substantial shift: enabling sizable *urban school systems* to undergo wholesale conversions of hundreds and, eventually, thousands of schools at once.

This growth model, depicted in Figure 4, line 5, comprises a discontinuous process in which the number of ELT

schools spurts up by 100,000 or more year after year. Two primary factors distinguish this model from incremental approaches and make such seemingly impossible leaps feasible:

- First, the funding comes from seven-and even eight-figure multi-year grants provided by consortiums of public and private institutional funders in the form of growth capital commitments.
- Second, the funding is deployed under NCTL's guidance in ways that are designed to mitigate the substantial "adoption risks" that large school districts will face when trying to responsibly reorganize large segments of their customer schools.

Unlike the more or less continuous process of incremental growth in which individual ELT schools come on line whenever they're ready to go, there are long gaps (represented by the dotted lines in Figure 4) between "sales" in the exponential model. These gaps represent the much greater time and effort — and corresponding development and marketing costs — required to address the institutional and systemic concerns that vast school districts must take into account as they consider wholesale conversion of hundreds of schools that are collectively responsible for thousands of students.

To be sure, NCTL will have its work cut out for it. On the one hand, the schools have consistently failed to meet the educational and developmental needs of their charges for

years, so the promise of ELT should be alluring. On the other, the failure to adequately plan and manage the conversion for so many schools at once could be catastrophic. For these wholesale customers to decide to sign up for ELT, they must be satisfied that the risks of switching substantially outweigh the risks of maintaining the status quo, however flawed it might be.

This is why exponential growth is different in kind from incremental growth and not just different in degree. Unlike individual schools that only have to consider their own planning and implementation challenges from ELT redesign, large school districts encounter massive strategic, financial, logistical, workforce, safety, and administrative risks that are orders of magnitude more complex. Although individual schools face substantial planning and implementation challenges from ELT redesign, they face almost none (or much-reduced versions) of the risks of disruptions to such higher-level responsibilities as labor-management relations, facilities and vendor acquisition and management, food service, student health and social services, transportation, and special needs. For these large multi-school enterprises that are struggling to provide adequate educations to thousands of underserved children, adoption risk is the decisive factor in considering whether to undertake ELT redesign.

**Insert Figure 4. Incremental v. Exponential Growth Rates**

A 2004 study of the "The Role of the District in Driving School Reform" illustrates why the next phase of NCTL's will be so different from the first two stages during which it has enjoyed so much success:

"Education reform over the past several decades has focused largely on the role of school-based efforts to improve student achievement, combined with attention to changes in state and federal policy designed to assist all students in achieving high standards. A notable gap in many school improvement initiatives has been careful examination of the role of the district in leading, or impeding, change. But clearly the district has a critical role to play. All districts share the challenges of implementing high standards and raising achievement levels for all students. Often an overlooked component of school reform as attention (and drama) focuses on individual schools, the district can be a key element of support. Because they frequently set personnel, instructional and resource policies, districts may hold the ultimate power in turning rhetoric to reality. Effective districts have some common characteristics: they focus steadfastly on improving student achievement and raising standards, they become leaders in instructional improvement and professional development, they emphasize the use of data for decision-making, and they realign operations on all levels around common goals and superior service. Furthermore, to become leaders and enablers of school-level change, they need to focus on the process of leading

change to build commitment and alignment across organizational boundaries." (Muller, 2004).

It is not a criticism to say that NCTL has only begun to identify and respond to these "macro" risks to the same commendable extent it has addressed the "micro" risks facing individual schools. Just as NCTL understood the need to help simplify the decisions of individual schools to redesign their schedules, so now must it begin the difficult but essential work of anticipating and mitigating a whole new array of unresolved issues that comprise adoption risk for large school districts.

Like its "whole schools" strategy, NCTL's "whole systems" strategy will have two major components: product and marketing. As to product, NCTL must develop a substantially reworked toolkit that guides wholesale school-system customers through the full range of second-order challenges they will face in becoming ELT systems. For example, Mass 2020's school-focused "Guide for ELT Planning and Redesign" would have to be revised and extended for school districts to substantially the same degree that the job of school principal relates to the job of school superintendent.

As to marketing, their communications must take their conversations with those same wholesale customers to a higher level, one that squarely takes into account their legitimate systemic concerns and demonstrates that NCTL can be relied upon to capably support them

throughout the multi-year decision-making, planning and implementing processes. This approach will surely prolong the sales cycle (hence the dashed lines on Figure 4), but the upside potential would be commensurately greater once wholesale customers decide to switch many of their retail school operations at once. (Moore, 2004).

The funding needed to underwrite the development and execution of the new product and marketing strategies will also be different in kind from NCTL's current approach. Just as high-growth nonprofits require working capital for capacity building rather than just restricted funds for direct programming, so will NCTL and their school system customers need considerable reserves of "patient capital," (Overholser) first, to figure out what it will take to convert entire school districts without significant disruption of ongoing operations and, second, to actually deliver the substantial levels of support needed. If financial constraints put NCTL in the position of over-promising and under-delivering, it will take that much longer to convince prudent school district leaders to go forward.

It follows that, as NCTL gears up for third-stage growth, it should consider revisiting its strategy of exclusive reliance on government funding. Although it is undoubtedly true that one million ELT students cannot be enrolled within the decade without quite substantial public funding, NCTL isn't likely to get its national initiative off the ground unless it finds a way around the budgetary extremism in which

states and school systems find themselves. The \$500,000 that Mass 2020 secured for planning grants in 2005 might well become \$5,000,000 just for NCTL to launch the next phase. The \$120 million Growth Capital Aggregation Pilot organized by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation for just three growth-ready nonprofits — Nurse-Family Partnership, Youth Build and Citizen Schools — provides an excellent example of this approach:

"As of June 25, 2008, EMCF committed \$39 million of a \$120 million total goal, and 19 co-investors (and each organization's board) committed the remaining \$81 million. Co-investors in each organization signed a shared 'Memorandum of Understanding' that outlines a joint set of terms and conditions, performance metrics to be used by all investors, shared reporting, and a financial model that allows the grantee to draw down growth capital only if it achieves performance milestones, including the securing of reliable, renewable funding. All the GCAP funding flows directly from investors to the grantees, with coordinated payout schedules ...If the pilot proves successful, the initial infusion of \$120 million in up-front growth capital will lay the groundwork and pave the way for additional investment and support by others. All three organizations will continue to raise significant amounts of renewable, reliable private and public funding to execute their growth strategies and achieve long-term sustainability." (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation).

# The Audacity of Growth

## The Audacity of Growth

NCTL's vision of one million ELT students in 10 years is a classic example of a "Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal," or BHAG: a "huge, daunting challenge" that galvanizes an entire organization for at least 10 years around a "unifying focal point of effort." Commonly-cited examples include President Kennedy's 1961 pledge to land on the moon within a decade and Bill Gates' 1975 vision for "a computer on every desk and in every home." One essential factor in setting such a long-term vision is that it must be at least theoretically achievable, albeit with considerable difficulty:

"Setting the BHAG that far into the future requires thinking beyond the current capabilities of the organization and the current environment.... A BHAG should not be a sure bet — it will have perhaps only a 50% to 70% probability of success — but the organization must believe that it can reach the goal anyway."

There have always been three hurdles to social progress: (1) the discovery of effective interventions to address the immediate problem at hand; (2) the attraction of funding to support the reliable delivery of the new intervention; and (3) the wide-scale propagation of the innovation to everyone who needs it. This last hurdle itself has two parts: (a) substantially greater funding and

(b) substantially greater organizational capacity and/or substantial replication of working models.

The eradication of polio provides a good analogy. First the vaccine had to be developed, then it had to acquire sufficient funding to prove its efficacy and safety, and then it had to be produced and distributed to millions of people. Without the final step, the first two steps would have been inconsequential.

NCTL's audacious vision is achievable if the means of its pursuit are as innovative as the ELT movement itself. Steady, incremental growth, however capably pursued, is unlikely to reach the goal. If we really want to transform American public schools in the ways that NCTL's founders have envisioned, a bolder course is required. Marshaling both public and private funders around a multi-year growth-capital strategy that supports the wholesale conversion of hundreds and eventually thousands of schools to redesigned extended-day programs by reducing the adoption risks facing large urban school districts is an audacious but serious approach that avoids wishful thinking. The drive to rescue public education is not the only urgent need for a more deliberate way of scaling what works, but NCTL just might have one of the first viable models.

**Steven H. Goldberg is the author of *Billions of Drops in Millions of Buckets: Why Philanthropy Doesn't Advance Social Progress* (Wiley 2009). He is based in**

Boston and can be reached at [stevegoldb@gmail.com](mailto:stevegoldb@gmail.com).

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