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HUFFPOST SPOTLIGHT: ENERGY

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A Win for Expanded Learning

The movement to give American kids more time and opportunities to learn took a giant leap forward with action in the Senate this week.

The Senate introduced an omnibus spending bill that includes two significant advances for which we have long fought, along with many leaders, in after-school and education reform. Under this bill, funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers would be increased by \$135 million next year, potentially helping 135,000 more kids in the hours after 3 p.m. and during summers.

More historically, passage of this bill would allow states to fund expanded learning time programs as a viable school transformation strategy, while maintaining the growing national network of high quality after-school and summer programs. States would be able to use 21CCLC funds to re-design and expand the school day and year, in addition to supporting more traditional after-school programs.

And this is key: if schools choose to re-invent themselves through longer learning days, they must work with partnering community organizations to add both more time on academics plus enrichments that inspire kids to love learning. By taking this step, policy-makers protect against a system that penalizes poor kids by allowing these funds to support remediation-only school day extensions, denying the lowest-performing kids the kind of broad and rich education more affluent communities provide.

Just a few days ago I visited one of TASC's Expanded Learning Time schools in a section of the Bronx, Mott Haven, that author Jonathan Kozol famously characterized as one of the bleakest points on America's educational map. The Haven Academy charter school there is working with the community organization New York Foundling to send community educators into classrooms, alongside teachers, every day from noon to 5:45 p.m. Kids - a third of whom are in foster care, a third of whose families are in preventive services and another third who come from the

neighborhood - not only get more intensive small group math and English instruction, but they also get support for their healthy emotional and physical development. They dance and make music and cook - just kids having creative fun together.

This looks like the school of the future to me, the thriving center of a community of learners.

To get to this point, historic allies in building after-school opportunities had to struggle toward a consensus over whether and how to deliver to kids the longer learning days many desperately need. Thanks to the close relationships we've built through organizations including the Afterschool Alliance, the Collaborative for Building After-School Systems and the Partnership for Children and Youth, we achieved a double victory.

The Senate bill preserves local choice so that states and communities can decide what kind of expanded learning opportunities best serve their kids - after school, during summer or through longer school days. And with greater support for Expanded Learning Time schools, we can help more kids get a world class education.

Item one on my agenda now is urging Congress to make this bill a law.