

GLOBE EDITORIAL

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Learning in the afternoons

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SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY is trying to retool afternoons, making them more educational by recruiting recent college graduates to become after-school teachers.

It's a smart idea. Students often use after-school hours to work or unwind. But the nation must spend these hours more wisely, using them to help students excel so that they have a better shot at competing in the global economy. Afternoons can be a chance to master basics, do special projects, take on college-level work, or explore careers.

Massachusetts is already trying to escape from the antique 6.5-hour school day. Leading the charge is Massachusetts 2020, a local nonprofit organization that runs an expanded learning time initiative to help schools redesign the learning day.

Kennedy has added crucial federal support. He has filed a bill -- part of the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act -- that would invite college graduates to join a national after-school corps of teaching fellows. The teaching fellows would serve two years, working during the day with teachers in classrooms and then running after-school programs.

"It's an amazing way to start a teaching career," explains Amy Parsons, who spent two years teaching in an after-school program run by Citizen Schools, a local nonprofit organization. This program uses AmeriCorps funds to pay its teaching fellows \$22,000 a year, but far more funding is needed, according to Citizen Schools President Eric Schwarz.

Parsons says her teaching experience was a daily lesson in how it feels to be a student. It prompted her to think about how to support the kids as they do class work, homework, and manage tough personal issues.

Since after-school programs are optional, Parsons says that staffers have to be engaging enough to compel students to keep coming, building relationships with students and their families and celebrating students' accomplishments.

"Trust is the hugest thing," she says.

Parsons earned a master's degree through a program run jointly by Citizen Schools and Lesley University. And she is now a first-year teacher at Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, a public school for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders.

Multiply her story by the \$600 million that Kennedy's bill would invest, and the results could be immense. The fellows would work with schools and community organizations. They would have a chance to earn graduate degrees in education, which could enlarge the candidate pool of full-day teachers. And with fresher memories of being young, the fellows could also be dynamic role models and mentors to students.

Congress should pass the bill. It is part of a larger campaign to modernize school days so that they lift America's students to new heights of achievement in school and in life. ■