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LETTER

'Longer Year' Commentary Misses After-School Angle

To the Editor:

Mike Schmoker raises some interesting points in his online Commentary "**Do We Really Need a Longer School Year?**" (July 7, 2009). He is correct that we must make the current school day and year more engaging, challenging, and relevant, but his framework is much too narrow.

Many young people need more time, more opportunities, and more positive adult connections to succeed. As Richard W. Riley, my former boss as U.S. secretary of education during the Clinton administration, would explain, many children and youths are shortchanged by our ignoring the potential of more time and more people to help young people and communities get ahead.

Transforming the school day and coupling it with engaging after-school and summer learning, community connections, and support is a better recipe for learning in these rapidly changing times. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has described these linkages when he has called for strengthening and reforming teaching and learning in a variety of ways, including offering an array of after-school activities such as drama, arts, sports, chess, debate, academic enrichment, and programs for parents and for making schools the centers of the community so great things can happen.

In Charleston, S.C., and North Charleston, we are beginning work on reimagining how, when, and where young people learn. Teachers, principals, parents, and representatives from the city, school district, local colleges, community, and 15 of our highest-poverty schools gathered at the end of July to plan the best ways to reach students and prepare them for the demands of the global economy. Working as part of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation's New Day for Learning initiative, we are focused on creating seamless learning opportunities for our young people, ones that are not limited by walls, clocks, or calendars.

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[← Back to Story](#)

