



## Graduate School of Education & Human Development

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**Embargoed until January 13, 2015, 12:01 a.m.**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Report Showcases Local Approaches to Meet Federal Expanded Learning Time Requirements**

***Adding time for teacher collaboration and instructional improvement as  
important as increasing students' class time, say study participants***

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Jan. 13, 2015—Low-performing schools use various approaches to meet federal requirements to expand learning time, such as extending the school day or year, reducing non-instructional time, and adding time for teacher activities to improve instruction. These customized approaches are showcased in a report released today by the Center on Education Policy (CEP). District and school leaders in four states visited for the report also stress that strengthening the quality of instructional time is just as important as increasing quantity, and most worry about how to sustain expanded time initiatives after federal grants expire.

“CEP’s comprehensive study shows that local strategies to expand learning time are most effective when they focus on both students *and* teachers. Any effort to expand learning time should go hand in hand with a plan for improving the quality of instruction,” said Maria Ferguson, CEP Executive Director.

Two federal initiatives—the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program and waivers of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—call on school districts to expand learning time in low-performing schools. The CEP report summarizes findings from case studies of 17 low-performing schools in 11 districts in Colorado, Connecticut, Oregon, and Virginia, and focuses on state and local responses to these federal learning time requirements. The case studies included site visits and interviews with 49 state, district, and school officials. The full case studies, including four state-level overviews, are available separately online.

The approaches used to expand learning time vary according to state and local policies, student and teacher needs, availability of resources, and local capacity, according to the CEP report. These approaches, which are often used in combination, include adding time to the school day or year, restructuring time within the existing school schedule, and increasing time for teacher collaboration, planning, and professional development. Some case study sites also provide summer or out-of-school opportunities and/or collaborate with community partners to offer remediation and enrichment to students.

“At almost every school we visited, study participants emphasized that expanded learning time cannot be more of the same,” said Jennifer McMurrer, lead author of the study. “Schools were strategic and

purposeful about their use of time for both students and teachers. And many state and local officials said it was important to include academic and enrichment activities in expanded learning time initiatives to provide students with multiple ways to learn.”

While officials CEP interviewed generally had positive views of the effectiveness of expanded learning time (ELT), most emphasized that it is only one aspect of a school’s overall improvement plan. All of the case study schools were simultaneously implementing other reforms to improve student achievement. Although some case study schools pointed to evidence of improved student outcomes, such as increased test scores or graduation rates, interviewees were careful to note that these improvements cannot be attributed solely to ELT.

States and districts vary in their level of involvement and support for ELT initiatives in schools. Some state policies and programs may facilitate ELT, the study found. For example, case study schools with “innovation” or charter status in Colorado and Connecticut reported fewer challenges implementing ELT programs than other schools in the study.

Study participants also reported that ELT initiatives are costly and the short-term nature of federal grants is causing difficulties for some schools. Nearly all interviewees said that sustaining ELT after federal grants end is a major challenge. Other challenges to ELT include adjusting teacher schedules, working within union contracts, modifying district-wide transportation services, and dealing with teacher and student fatigue from the longer instructional day. In addition, some participants had difficulty aligning federally funded ELT initiatives with existing local reforms. The separate collection of case studies highlights how different districts and schools approached these challenges based on their state and local contexts.

Matt Frizzell, a co-author of the study, emphasized that the report is meant to be a resource for anyone interested in how ELT can be used as a part of an overall improvement strategy. “All the schools in this study are working to improve teaching and learning within their unique local contexts. We strongly encourage policy makers and educators to use these case studies as a resource because they illustrate many different approaches to ELT within a range of school settings.”

The report concludes that the ELT provisions of the SIG and ESEA waiver requirements are performing a valuable function by encouraging the nation’s most struggling schools to rethink the use of time, one of their most valuable assets for improving teaching and learning. Interviewees in the four states recognized that ELT initiatives can be beneficial in improving low-performing schools. The report suggests, however, that the federal government could encourage a more thoughtful use of school time if federal support for ELT was more flexible and allowed for more customized school improvement efforts to meet local needs and contexts.

The CEP report, *Expanded Learning Time: A Summary of Findings from Case Studies in Four States*, as well as detailed reports for each of the four states and 11 districts with the 17 case study schools, can be accessed free of charge from the CEP web site at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

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