Patria PreK-8 School  
Tutima School District, Virginia*

This is one of four state and 11 district case study papers from the Center on Education Policy (CEP) describing expanded learning time (ELT) initiatives. The major findings from all of the case studies are presented in the CEP summary report *Expanded Learning Time: A Summary of Findings from Case Studies in Four States.*

**Key Findings**

- **Expanded learning time has played a major role in improving reading achievement, according to a district official.** The district official pointed to reading gains in kindergarten and third grade at Patria.

- **Because ELT is an expensive school improvement strategy, district leaders emphasized the need to carefully plan for and structure additional time to ensure it is used effectively.**

- **School leaders at Patria drew from the district’s previous experience with ELT at other schools to make the transition to a longer school day nearly seamless.**

- **A community partner, through the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grant, supports ELT efforts at Patria by providing tutors in all grades 5-8 classrooms during the final 90 minutes of the school day.**

**Background**

The Tutima School District is classified as a city by the Department of Education’s Common Core of Data but is called a mixture of urban and suburban by one interviewee. Its students come from a variety of economic backgrounds, and its English language learner population has been growing. At the time of this study, the district had two focus schools and one priority school.

* To encourage frank responses from local interviewees, we have used pseudonyms for the case study districts and schools and for individuals interviewed in these sites. For the state-level interviewees, however, we have used the individuals’ real names.
Patria School serves students from pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. It has not met the performance benchmarks needed to be fully accredited by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and has been designated as a priority school. The school has a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) and is using those funds, as well as other resources, to expand learning time by 360 minutes a week. (See table 1 for more school information.)

**Table 1. Patria School information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>PreK-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locale*</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial demographics*</td>
<td>Predominately African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage free and reduced lunch**</td>
<td>Roughly 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students*</td>
<td>Fewer than 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student to teacher ratio*</td>
<td>Fewer than 15 students per teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has or had a school improvement grant</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIG intervention model</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st CCLC in 2013-14</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has been or is a priority school under state waiver</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From CCD Public school data 2010-11, 2011-12 school years.

**From Virginia Department of Education (2014)

Note: To protect the anonymity of schools all figures are approximations.

The information in this case study for both the Tutima district and Patria School is based on an interview with one district official, Ms. Anderson, who oversees the Title I program. For a variety of reasons, it was not possible to meet with the principal at Patria. In lieu of an interview, the principal agreed to read a draft of this report and verify that the school level ELT initiatives have been accurately represented.

**District and School Descriptions**

*Tutima District Description*

Anderson oversees school improvement initiatives in Tutima and has recently expanded her purview to include state accreditation in the district. (At the time of the interview, six district schools were not fully accredited.) Because Anderson oversees both of these areas, she and her team have unique insight to the schools under their guidance, as this comment from Anderson suggests:

*I think a lot of the work that we've done under the accreditation system has really been very beneficial for the priority and focus schools that are also not fully accredited because it gives us additional opportunities to look more closely at the real nuts and bolts of the curriculum, at teaching and learning, down to lesson planning and lesson observations. The type of feedback that we're giving schools is not required under the priority or focus systems.*
The federal policies for priority schools and the state accreditation policies were fairly well aligned, said Anderson, and had been beneficial at Patria.

In working with Patria to develop its program, the district was able to build on its experience in implementing ELT at another district school, Anderson explained:

Knowing all that the district went through in our efforts to expand learning time in the previous SIG schools, we knew right out of the gate [that] if this school becomes identified as a priority school, we wanted to be able to say, “Here is our plan for expanding learning time” in a very definitive, very clear, and thoughtful way.

As a result of the district’s previous experience with SIG schools, expanding learning time was one of the first actions the district took in complying with the SIG requirements at Patria.

The district also played a vital role in communicating with parents and other stakeholders about Patria’s ELT initiative. In some cases, the district organized community meetings; in other cases, the district acted as a liaison between the school and the state. When district officials were designing the ELT schedule for Patria, they listened to and tried to include stakeholders in the planning process. Ten parent meetings and multiple school board meetings were held during this process, said Anderson. “We had lots of conversations with folks trying to get them comfortable with this notion of extending the school day just by 90 minutes,” she explained. District officials also made sure that Patria’s ELT plan was in compliance with state requirements. Anderson spoke about this concern:

We [the district leaders] don’t want to go through this entire process and get [school] board approval and have them talk to parents and have meetings and persuade teachers that it is going to be okay, and then come back and find out that the state would not approve the decision.

Patria School Description

While the district has a large proportion of English language learners, that is not the case at Patria School. Anderson described the school population as native English speakers from households struggling with generational poverty. The school has a high teacher turnover rate, she said; in the year before the school received its SIG grant, over 60% of the teachers left. The next school year, during the first year of the SIG grant implementation, fewer teachers left, but the school still lost about a third of its teaching force. The high turnover has resulted in a novice teaching staff with few teachers who have been at the school for more than five years.

The district has a modified open enrollment policy, whereby parents could opt out of one school and, depending on school capacity, send their children to another school that is better aligned with their needs. Some parents did opt to send their children to Patria
School because of its relatively small middle school population compared with other middle schools in the district. However, many of the students who opted to enroll at Patria School were high-need or at-risk students. Prior to school year 2012-13, families could also make use of the No Child Left Behind Act provision of School Choice, and opt to send their child to another school in the district that was not in School Improvement sanctions. Although the School Choice option is no longer operative due to Virginia’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act waiver, when Patria School was identified as a priority school and expanded its learning day, families were given the option to change schools, as long as their newly selected school could accommodate the influx. Some families did decide to leave Patria, mostly because of scheduling conflicts.

Despite some pushback from parents on the implementation of the ELT schedule at the start of the 2012-13 SY, Patria School continues to have strong community support and engagement, said Anderson. “If you review any board item that references [Patria] . . . the number of community comments at the beginning of that board meeting will always be tremendously high.” Furthermore, Anderson pointed out, Patria has an active parent group, constant open houses, and parent drop-in meetings—all of which help foster community support for the school.

Under Virginia’s ESEA waiver, priority and focus schools are also required to hire a turnaround coach who has been approved by the state Office of School Improvement. “It helps because they [the turnaround coaches] have the Office of School Improvement’s perspective, but they’re also coming with their years of experience,” said Anderson. “Most of them are long-time administrators in districts in Virginia or have worked with schools in improvement and turnaround schools.”

**Expanded Learning Time**

According to VDOE ELT can be defined in several ways; extending the school day for all students, providing instruction before or after the school day, instruction for identified students or offering instruction during non-instructional days. Tutima does not have many SIG schools and, as a result, district leaders have not established a district wide definition of ELT. As Anderson put it, “The definition is almost what we are doing.” At Patria, ELT aligns with the state definition.

Originally, 90 minutes of instructional time was added to every school day for teachers and Tuesday through Friday for students. However, students were restless on Fridays, and school officials felt the extra time was not as productive as the other days of the week. Patria leaders requested a change to their ELT program from the state Office of School Improvement. Because their school had shown increases in achievement and stability, the request was approved. Therefore, during its second year as a priority school, Patria’s school day was increased by 90 minutes on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. On Mondays, the students are dismissed at 2:35 p.m., and teachers use the extra 90-minute block after the students leave for professional development. On Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, all staff and students are in school until 4:00 p.m. On Fridays, students are
dismissed at 2:35 p.m. and teachers leave at 2:55 p.m. Pre-K students do not participate in the expanded day because district officials, school leaders, and parents felt they were too young for that long of a school day.

On the days when students are present for the expanded time, the extra time is integrated into the school day. There is no break in routine or transition to an afterschool activity. “There’s no feeling like, ‘Now it’s 2:35 or 3:00 and we’re transitioning into the extended day.’ It is just part of the day,” said Anderson. Because ELT is really just an extension of the academic day, during the time between 2:35 and 4:00 the entire school staff remains in the building.

Anderson stressed that it was priority for the school to embed ELT within the school day and to have the same teachers working with students, “That’s by design, because who better to be there with those students than the people that are with them every single day, who know their data in and out, who know their needs and their challenges inside and out.” Patria’s professional development is focused on using overall teaching and learning time more effectively rather than specifically emphasizing how to use the ELT.

Targeted intervention is another element to ELT in Patria. The school invites students, based on academic need, to participate in Saturday school, which runs for three hours, and in a two-week long summer learning program. These programs are funded with district money and state Standards of Quality (SOQ) funds, which are the largest source of direct state aid for K-12 education. SOQ funding is provided through state budget for 11 different accounts, one of which is Prevention, Intervention, and Remediation. Students who need the academic remediation services are invited to attend these sessions.

**Funding and Resources**

Expanded learning time is a very expensive school level intervention, Anderson pointed out. Patria has absorbed some of the cost of ELT by using the 20% set-aside flexibility under Virginia’s ESEA waiver. Under NCLB, school districts with schools that are designated as needing improvement (i.e., schools that did not make adequate yearly progress for two or more consecutive years) were required to set aside 20% of their Title I allocation for transportation for students electing to change schools under that law’s public school choice provisions and for tutoring services for struggling students. Under Virginia’s ESEA waiver, these funds can continue to be used to provide these services, or districts can instead use the funds to support other school improvement activities. Patria uses the majority of the 20% set-aside to support the expanded learning day. Anderson explained:

*We use a small amount of that money [the 20% set aside] to pay for the required state [turnaround coach] that comes from the Office of School Improvement at the Virginia Department of Education for our focus schools. But other than that, the rest of the money, it pays for that extra 90 minutes of salary for the teachers. It pays for the snacks that we give the kids. I think it is really just salary, benefits, snacks, and that is it.*
Other than paying teachers a flat hourly rate for teaching an extra 90 minutes, the district did not make any changes in its policies for teacher or staff compensation when it implemented ELT at Patria, Anderson explained. However, there is an ongoing discussion about changing the pay scale for teachers in SIG schools. The priority schools were not identified until shortly before the beginning of the school year, which left little time to make policy changes. “It really did happen very fast—because the time between when you get labeled a priority school and school beginning is a matter of weeks,” she said. “There wasn’t time to develop policy and sit down and redo entire teacher pay scales and those kinds of things. There was a lot of discussion but there wasn’t time.” The amount of compensation teachers receive for the extra time is based on the current districtwide teacher contracts.

Additionally, Patria has a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant through a community partner. This community partner has become a part of ELT at Patria by providing tutors in grades 5 through 8 during the regular school day. “[The community partner] works specifically with the middle school component, but it actually starts with fifth grade,” said Anderson. “Their tutors are in the classroom for that last hour of the day, the extended part of the day, every single day, working directly with the classroom teacher.”

The VDOE also provides some support for ELT in Tutima. While Anderson said that VDOE did not provide money directly for ELT, officials at the Office of School Improvement were helpful when Tutima was going through the school improvement process. She spoke of her strong relationship with the state school improvement officials and the support that they offered:

\begin{quote}
I think I have a good relationship with the folks who are at the Office of School Improvement. I’ve talked to them a lot. I know many of their phone numbers by heart. I ask them a lot of questions, and as we think through making these kinds of decisions and as we were deciding what we were going to do, we were in constant conservation with them.
\end{quote}

Most of the conversations focused on defining the parameters of acceptable improvement strategies and making sure that any district or school level changes complied with state requirements. As mentioned above, the state also mandates that the school bring in a state-approved turnaround coach to work with the priority schools. However, the state does not pay for the coach; in Patria’s case, the coach is paid for with the Title I 20% set-aside funds.

**Progress with ELT**

When discussing Patria’s success in implementing ELT, Anderson kept returning to the academic gains that students have made since the school first expanded its learning day. She pointed in particular to gains among struggling students who were 3rd graders when Patria was labeled a priority school:
There’s no question that we can see the impact of the extended day... Those students began their third grade year as... non-readers. And they are native English speakers... They have gained two, three, four years since ELT started. We’re finally starting to see it register.

Anderson also noted that kindergarteners are benefiting from the expanded learning day. Kindergarten is the first year when students remain in the building until 4:00 p.m. Anderson said, of this population: “And we know [the learning gains are] because we’re getting them in kindergarten and we’re [providing ELT in kindergarten]... I think there is no way you can deny that an additional 90 minutes a day is not having an impact on them.”

Anderson pointed out that the extra time allows for a more robust literacy program. Patria is able to keep the required 90-minute block of literacy instruction without losing instructional time in other subjects or sacrificing enrichment and remediation blocks.

Challenges

Patria did face a few challenges in transitioning to an expanded school day but mostly overcame them, Anderson said. The lack of adequate time to prepare for the expanded learning day before the school year began presented logistical challenges. As discussed earlier, the school received notice that it was a priority school just weeks before the first day of school, so decisions had to be made quickly. The urgency of moving forward with ELT overshadowed other challenges of implementing this strategy.

The move to expand the school day with short notice had a great impact on some teachers and parents, and the district took steps to address those concerns. For example, because some of Patria’s teachers travel long distances to get to the school, the district offered teachers who felt they could not make the new schedule work for them another position in the district. While only a few of these teachers took that transfer option, it meant that Patria would be short staffed during the school year until they could fill the openings. Likewise, some parents, particularly those of younger children, were upset that the school day was being expanded. The district offered parents the option to transfer their student to another school if they did not like the new school hours. Anderson reported that about 10 families took advantage of this option, even though it meant that they would have to provide their own transportation for their children to the transfer school.

Another challenge that the district faced was that the school began implementing the expanded school day in November, but federal funding to support this school improvement effort did not arrive until January. The district supported the ELT program during this interim period.

By the time of the interview, most of these challenges had been resolved and the expanded learning day was fully implemented. As such, teachers know what is expected of their time
and students and parents also know what to expect when they enrolled in the school, said Anderson. “There were initial challenges, in short. Not so much anymore. I think folks are more comfortable with it now,” she said.

**Perceptions about ELT**

While Anderson said that ELT has benefitted students in Patria, she also noted that it is an expensive school improvement initiative that it might not work for all schools. Notably, another school in the Tutima school district that had tried an expanded school year ultimately decided that the program was too expensive and did not offer enough benefits to justify maintaining it.

The costs associated with ELT are twofold, said Anderson. First, ELT interventions are “tremendously expensive” and take funds from other programs. Second, ELT places a burden on school staff to work the extra hours. “ELT comes with a little extra pay, but it’s a heck of a lot more work,” she commented, noting that at a priority school like Patria, students are typically behind academically. “It would be a lot more work than working in a school where you don’t have these kinds of challenges. You’re done at 2:35 every day; that is not the case at Patria,” she added.

As a final note, Anderson made the point that if instruction is not good, then ELT will not be worthwhile:

> I’m not in favor of extending poor instruction. But in the case where we’re talking about additional, structured learning time with assessments and data analysis, additional opportunities to provide intervention, additional opportunities to carve out time to do small groups and one-on-one instruction to really get those targeted interventions going, there’s no way that can’t be good.

**References**
