Expanded Learning Time in Oregon: Embracing Initiatives and Addressing Challenges"*

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 in Oregon occurs both within and outside the regular school day, depending on funding sources and school and district priorities.** Schools receiving federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) typically focus on expanding time within the school day. Additional academic and enrichment opportunities are provided to students in afterschool programs, some of which are funded by 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) grants.

- **The most commonly cited challenge with ELT was funding and sustainability.** District and school leaders said that finding sufficient funding to sustain these initiatives after the School Improvement Grants end was a major challenge, particularly because SIG monies were the main source of support for ELT. Other challenges included negotiating teacher union contracts, arranging transportation for students, and dealing with high staff turnover in some 21st CCLC sites.

- **State, district, and school officials agreed that ELT can help improve low-performing schools.** However, all emphasized that ELT is only one component of school improvement and that it must be combined with high-quality instruction and targeted interventions for struggling students.

Background

After receiving an allocation of School Improvement Grant funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2010, Oregon identified schools eligible for

* 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.
SIGs—those among the lowest achieving in the state based on state test scores and improvements in those scores as well as on graduation rates in high schools, for students overall and for student subgroups. School districts with successful SIG applications received three-year grants for their identified schools, although they were later allowed to extend their grants for an additional year.

Oregon awarded SIG funds to its first cohort of 12 schools beginning in school year 2010-11 and to a second cohort of 7 schools beginning in school year 2011-12 (Scott & Krasnoff, 2013). All three of the schools in our study received SIG funding in the second cohort and chose school improvement models that required expanded learning time; all three schools used some of their grant funds for this purpose.

ELT in Oregon has also been influenced by the state’s application for a waiver of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements, which was approved by the U.S. Department of Education in July 2012. During the summer of 2012, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) identified its lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools as “priority” schools based on test score and graduation criteria similar to those used for SIG eligibility. (See Appendix A for more information on SIG and priority school identification.) Consistent with its approved waiver, the state identified all of its SIG schools (including our three case study school) as priority schools. Similar to the SIG requirements of schools in Oregon, under the federal waiver rules, these priority schools must include ELT in their school improvement plans.

As of the writing of this report, Oregon’s waiver has been designated “at risk” by the federal government, on the grounds that the state had not fully implemented a new teacher evaluation system in all districts during the 2013-14 school year, as ED required. However, Oregon officials said they believed the state would be able to meet the requirements and continue working with priority schools under the waiver (McNeil, 2013). Oregon received an extension of its waiver on October 9, 2014.

The federal 21st CCLC initiative has also provided funding for afterschool programs and expanded learning outside of the regular school day in Oregon. Since 2002, when the state was first awarded the grant, ODE has administered this program, which supports out-of-school learning time for high-poverty students in Oregon. For the most recent grant cycle, there are 22 local Oregon grantees supporting 97 sites that serve an estimated 14,545 students (ODE, 2013). One of our three Oregon case study schools is in a district (referred to as the Poljot district) with a 21st CCLC grant, and the school has an afterschool program supported by this grant.

**Oregon Case Study Districts and Schools**

CEP conducted case studies of three SIG/priority schools, referred to by the pseudonyms of Corduba, Santos, and Kirov, located in three districts (see table 1). More detailed information about these districts and schools is included in the case study narratives.
accompanying this report on the CEP website at www.cep-dc.org.

Table 1. School information for Oregon case study districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School district</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grades served</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>SIG Intervention model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cartier</td>
<td>Santos</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Ms. Clarkson</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invicta</td>
<td>Corduba</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Mr. Thompson</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poljot</td>
<td>Kirov</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Mr. Romero</td>
<td>Transformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CEP interviewed three state-level officials for this report, shown in Table 2.

Table 2. State officials interviewed for the Oregon case study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Harlan</td>
<td>Director of school improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse Parsons</td>
<td>Education specialist in school improvement and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Ready</td>
<td>Education specialist in learning opportunities, options and supports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ELT During the School Day in Oregon

Under ESEA waivers and SIG grants, Oregon uses the federal definition of ELT and focuses primarily on increasing the length of the school day and increasing the time-on-task within each class. To help expand time in these two ways, the state encourages schools to use two formula-enabled spreadsheet tools for appraising the allocation of school time from the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL). This organization focuses on expanding learning time to improve student achievement, and works with districts and schools to help them redesign the school year or day to include more time for academic or enrichment opportunities and teacher collaboration. The first tool allows school leaders to enter data about the activities and timing of all elements of the school day. These spreadsheet calculations help school leaders identify ways to expand the day and enhance learning during the day. The second tool offers similar functions for tracking time within a single class and can be used by teachers and by staff members observing a particular class.

ODE provided professional development on how to use these tools to staff in all priority and SIG schools. Schools may also contact staff at NCTL if they have questions about how to use the tools. Several school and district officials interviewed for our study said they participated in the state’s professional development on NCTL’s tools, although many of them said they encountered barriers to implementing ELT as conceived by NCTL. They particularly questioned the organization’s concept that ELT would not have to cost more money if schools and districts simply used the tools to rearrange the school day and stagger teacher’s schedules. School and district leaders said that keeping the building open longer and providing extra pay or incentives for staff simply costs more than the status quo.

SIG schools, but not priority schools, also have specific additional funding to support added minutes to the school day. Jesse Parsons, education specialist in school improvement at the
Oregon Department of Education explained this difference:

*Non-SIG Priority schools are using the tools to assess how they're using their existing time. Some of them may decide to expand their time while some of them may decide to use their existing time more wisely. But the SIG schools are actually required to add minutes and increase learning time and may use their SIG funds to support this increase in learning time.*

All three case study schools increased instructional time during the regular school day. Kirov Elementary extended the school day by 30 minutes to offer students targeted instruction. Corduba High, an alternative school that had been designed to help students recover credits needed for graduation, shifted from a partial-day schedule to a full-day schedule with a traditional instructional program. Corduba students are now required to attend classes from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Santos High, which previously ended school an hour early twice a week to allow teachers to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs), changed this schedule so that half of the departments participate in the PLCs while the other half work with students on Wednesdays; they then switch roles on Thursdays. This allows students to receive two additional hours of instructional time per week.

**ELT Outside of the Regular School Day**

Expanded learning in Oregon’s 21st CCLCs currently focuses on out-of-school time. Although the ESEA waivers give approved states the option to use 21st CCLC grants to expand learning time during the regular school day, none of the current grantees are using, or have proposed to use, their funds for this purpose.

Pete Ready, who leads ODE’s work with 21st CCLCs, suggested that although the state is not opposed to using 21st CCLC funds for in-school ELT, such a policy should be implemented with caution:

*I think it’s prudent for 21st CCLC grantees to really think through their considerations for doing expanded learning time during the school day. The historical norm [for 21st CCLCs] has been . . . to provide discretionary competitive grant opportunities to open education agencies [such as schools] outside the regular school day. So, it’s before school, after school, during breaks, and summer programming.*

Ready noted that 21st CCLC programs have been operating outside the regular school day for several years and may want to continue and expand programs that are already working rather than shifting efforts to untried programs during the school day. Many of Oregon’s 21st CCLCs programs have focused the additional time on “creative or inquiry-based ways that are shown to have evidence for improving students’ capacity to master critical skills,” said Ready, and projects that are not typically offered during the regular school day.
Recently Oregon has also focused 21st CCLC grants on English language learners, STEM education, and career and technical education in order to align with Oregon’s state initiatives and the Governor’s priorities for education.

Because the 21st CCLC grantees design their own programs, implementation of ELT varies a great deal by site, Ready noted:

*In the 21st CCLC grant world, there is a considerable difference from district to district . . . Each [grant] design is distinctive and in that respect, it’s sensitive to the priorities of the local area, not only in terms of the goals they strive to meet with their achievement plans and improvement plans, but also in terms of the culture of the community. I’m glad the grant provides for local flexibility so that it doesn’t come down to an absolute list of things required of a district.*

The Poljot School District, which received a 21st CCLC grant in 2013 (a renewal of its original 2004 award), uses its funds to expand learning time before or after school or in the summer. The district currently has an afterschool program that is open to all K-12 students; all elementary and middle schools have an on-site program while all high schools are hosted at one site. In addition to this districtwide program, Kirov Elementary in the Poljot district uses its SIG funding to also provide a four-week summer school program to all students who are struggling in reading and math.

Districts and schools are also using other sources of funding to provide students with enrichment opportunities outside of the regular school day, often in partnership with external or community organizations. For example, Santos High partnered with a local organization to provide afterschool tutoring and recreational activities. The school has a Saturday Tutoring Program, offered twice per quarter to all students; however, students identified as needing extra support are required to attend. Corduba High offers internships, enrichment programs, and other activities over school vacation days to its students through its partnership with a local college. This program at the high school has become extremely popular, with students competing for spots in the program.

**ELT Funding and Resources**

Oregon relies primarily on federal funding for ELT. The SIG, Title I, and 21st CCLC programs are the main sources of funding for ELT in the state. State officials said they were very pleased to have these funds, but in all three programs, the funds are spread among a variety of activities rather than concentrated solely on ELT, whether within or outside the regular school day.

The most concentrated federal funding to improve schools in Oregon came from the two cohorts of SIG funding provided under the ARRA. Oregon’s 2010 SIG allocation amounted to more than $29 million, and this funding was combined with approximately $5 million in annual Title I section 1003(g) grants for school improvement. At the school level, this
meant that, on average, Oregon SIG schools received about $2.5 million over the three years of the grant. However, not all of this funding went to ELT. The 17 Oregon SIG schools in the two cohorts all chose the federal “transformation model” as their SIG intervention. This model requires 11 specific activities ranging from creating a staff evaluation system tied to student achievement to providing ongoing professional development for teachers, as well as expanding learning time. State officials said that, therefore, funding for ELT typically amounted to a small part of a school’s overall grant.

Funding for 21st CCLC has remained relatively stable over the past decade. For fiscal year 2014, Oregon is slated to receive about $10.8 million in federal funds for this program. For the most recent cohort of grantees, awards will average $438,000 per year in the first three years of the grant. Annual amounts decrease to 75% of their original annual amount in the fourth year and to 50% in the fifth year as grantees work toward sustainable funding streams. Ready noted that, thus far, the 21st CCLC funding has gone primarily to expanding learning outside the regular school day at a required minimum of 12 hours per week; therefore, keeping buildings open and hiring staff have been the major expenses.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, districts with Title I schools identified for improvement are required to set aside 20% of their Title I funds to provide supplemental educational services (tutoring) and to cover the costs of transporting students who wish to transfer to another public school under the law’s public school choice provisions. States applying for ESEA waivers could ask to eliminate this 20% set-aside requirement, which Oregon received approval to do. In Oregon, priority schools can use Title I funds, including the 20% set-aside, for ELT, although the set-aside is a small amount compared with SIG funding. In addition, Oregon’s priority schools may use other funds for ELT, such as local funding or external grants. There is no state funding specifically for ELT.

Schools have received other sources of funding or support for ELT, often from their district or external organizations. All three case study schools received district support; examples include district-provided social workers and community outreach workers, and additional funding for school-based programs, such as the night school program at Corduba High. Some schools receive funding and support by partnering with outside organizations. Santos High School currently receives tutorial mentoring support from a local organization, which has allowed the school to cut costs, according to a district official. Corduba High also receives support for ELT through its partnership with a state conservation organization for youth.

**Progress with ELT**

State leaders in Oregon were cautiously optimistic about the success of ELT in their SIG, priority, and 21st CCLC schools. Lisa Harlan said that ELT was one of three things needed to improve schools. The other two key levers, she said, were a high-quality instructional program and a targeted intervention program for struggling students.
Parsons, who works directly with SIG schools, noted several early successes. He said that in one school, more time for learning likely contributed to rising achievement:

_They staggered their start and end times, which was one of the suggestions that Ben Lummis [of the National Center on Time and Learning] made. So, they have class available from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 pm every day._

Similarly, Oregon’s 21st CCLC grantees have had successes in after-school learning time, Ready said:

_I can think of a district that found their achievement gap narrowed specifically with respect to English language learners. I can think of others that have had developments with respect to really transforming their schools into STEM schools because they started STEM after school._

Ready cautioned, however, that he did not attribute all school successes to the grant. Instead, he emphasized that partnerships and parent involvement fostered through 21st CCLC, combined with afterschool instruction, have led to successes for schools:

_Even though we like to have dreams of glory that we’ve done all these wonderful things, there are many other people working with the same students. So even though we’ve had successes, we’re just really tied into the partnerships, collaborations and good practices that individuals have implemented._

Oregon SIG schools in particular have shown positive trends in student achievement. From 2009 to 2012, both elementary and secondary SIG schools showed either larger gains or smaller losses than the state as a whole in their percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests (Scott & Kraskoff, 2013). For example, Corduba High School showed test gains of more than 20 percentage points in reading and 9 percentage points in math. Additionally, Ms. Johnson, the Poljot district’s 21st CCLC coordinator, explained that state test scores have improved among students participating in the afterschool programs.

Corduba, an alternative high school with a partial-day schedule, had low graduation rates—between 8% to 11%—prior to receiving SIG funding and implementing ELT. Since the implementation of ELT, graduation rates have more than doubled to 25%, and Corduba’s dropout rate is now the lowest among the alternative schools in the region. “That [increase in graduating students] is probably the biggest data point that would suggest that the extended learning is having an effect,” said Principal Thompson.

At Kirov Elementary, ELT has allowed school staff to identify student needs and modify the curriculum based on those needs, said Principal Romero. Although the school’s test scores have not increased, he and the teachers have seen academic improvement based on students’ classroom work. It is important to remember, however, that at Kirov and other SIG schools, ELT was just one of the school improvement initiatives undertaken.
Challenges of ELT in Oregon

Funding and sustainability of ELT and school improvement initiatives was a major challenge cited by district and school leaders. All three principals said that finding sufficient funding after the SIG grant ends presented a major challenge to sustaining ELT initiatives in their school, since SIG monies have been the main source of funding. At Santos High, Principal Clarkson said that she has already faced the challenge of having insufficient funding to hire more staff to fully implement ELT. Invicta district officials echoed these concerns, indicating funding would likely be an ongoing frustration. Similar concerns were expressed about the 21st CCLC funding; the coordinator of this program in the Poljot School District said she was trying to find different funding streams to sustain the program after the grant period ended.

In Oregon, all the state interviewees mentioned the common challenge of districts negotiating teachers’ union contracts that allow for ELT. ELT raised many questions for unions and districts, these state leaders said. Ready explained:

> If we are going to say we will provide funding to expand the learning day, we need to be talking about collective bargaining agreements. What staff are going to be doing that work? Does that add cost to the teaching and personal assistance contracts? If we’re going to require that expanded learning also includes a community partner, how does that community partner [fit] in the regular school day contract?

Gable, a Cartier School District official, agreed that teacher contracts were a major challenge to implementing ELT. Teacher contracts limited the number of students that teachers could supervise and also specified when teacher-led activities could take place—terms that made it difficult for the district and its schools to expand learning time.

Many 21st CCLC grantees, however, do not need to work within union contracts, Ready said, because they negotiated completely separate agreements with the districts. These agreements keep the school building open after school and bring in instructors who are not part of the district’s union contract.

Harlan said some districts with SIG or priority schools had taken steps to carry out ELT within existing contracts by implementing a “balanced calendar.” This type of calendar typically shortens the summer break and moves those vacation days to other breaks throughout the year. As a result students have fewer long breaks, although the school year might not necessarily increase in length. Harlan described the advantages of this model:

> I know that there are some schools that have gone to a balanced calendar, so it’s not necessarily extended time. The balanced calendar eliminates many of the long breaks that students have, which I think is a great idea because it
works within the contract that they have, without having to renegotiate it. It's a quicker way to get to where you're going.

State officials also mentioned other obstacles to ELT in SIG and priority schools. One such challenge is to find common teacher planning time in schools that have staggered teachers’ schedules as a way to expand learning time. “[T]he ability to have teachers have common collaboration time or prep time to be able to talk about either local assessment data or intervention data becomes super, super difficult when you have a staggered schedule,” said Harlan. While some SIG and priority schools have worked out scheduling issues, Harlan acknowledged that these issues were not always easily resolved in ways that pleased all staff members.

Providing transportation was also a challenge to implementing and sustaining ELT reforms in some schools. Funding for transportation can be an issue because districts need to run special buses for the schools with extended schedules. Time spent on the bus is also a challenge when students live far from school. Sometimes students are at school or on buses so long that they need to have an afternoon snack or even dinner at school. Harlan elaborated on this issue:

Transportation is often a really critical need, and sometimes can be a barrier. So making sure that you are not only taking into account the amount of money it takes to be able to provide the extended time, but that also you’re taking into account the food and transportation needs of the students that are there longer.

Kirov Elementary faced some transportation challenges when it extended the school day by 30 minutes. Since the school’s dismissal time was later than the rest of the district, the buses had to come to the school last. School leaders had to rework the bus routes, which require coordination and collaboration.

Due to longer commute times and isolated locations, rural schools in Oregon have particular difficulty with transportation issues related to ELT, Harlan said:

It becomes more difficult for rural districts in terms of transportation, transportation costs, and community . . . If you’re in a rural community, first of all, you probably don’t have very many buses anyway, but you have the same two or three buses that are running all of the routes for middle school, elementary and high school. That can be a scheduling nightmare. But then you also have some kids who could be on the bus for 45 minutes each way to get to and from school . . . It definitely becomes an issue, a barrier that you really have to address more in rural districts.

A final challenge mentioned by state officials was the difficulty of balancing students’ competing priorities after school, which may include playing sports, working to help
support families, and providing childcare for younger siblings. These activities may interfere with longer hours spent in class. State leaders said that students in high-poverty schools, in particular, were likely to have family and work responsibilities after school.

Schools with 21st CCLC programs also face unique challenges, often stemming from the need to keep buildings open and staffed after the regular school day.

One set of challenges relates to bringing in outside organizations to run 21st CCLC afterschool programs. These organizations may be viewed with skepticism by both parents and school staff, said Ready, unless the partners and the district communicate well during start up. Many 21st CCLC have had to work through this challenge, he said:

> I think generally speaking, it can be a threat to folks when they see community-based organization people running around their high school, and they are not too sure what they are doing there. But actually as it turns out, they are really family advocates.

Staff turnover is an ongoing challenge for 21st CCLC programs, Ready said, especially since 21st CCLCs compete with schools and other organizations that can offer full-time jobs with more regular hours. Ready explained:

> In some cases, we will have three to five different project coordinators in the life of the grant. That’s difficult. This goes with the territory and makes it all the more important for students to get some of the help we can provide them.

Leadership in 21st CCLC also fluctuates, which can make implementing the grant difficult for current staff.

> Sometimes the grant is written by one person and then that person is not part of the team, and so the effort is a little bit undeveloped. And then the superintendent changes or the principal is moved. Before long, you have something that was supposed to be an integral collaboration, and work is required to reintegrate the 21st CCLC program with priority student and school needs.

The 21st CCLC program in Poljot School District has had high staff turnover. The district’s 21st CCLC coordinator expressed concerns about the effect of constant turnover on program quality, in that the district must continually train new staff to place at these sites.

When the staff or leadership changes, Ready said he and his team often step in and help out. They do this by communicating the original intention of the grant and providing extra state attention to ensure that the grant implementation stays on track.
State and Local Perceptions of ELT

Expanding learning time in low-performing, high-poverty schools is essential to school improvement, according to ODE officials. Lisa Harlan, ODE’s director of school improvement, made this point:

*If you are talking about increasing achievement, or closing the achievement gap, if you are talking about either of those things happening in a high-poverty Title I school, there are couple of things that you have to do in order to turnaround a school, and expanded learning time would be one of them.*

State leaders strongly supported the idea that more time for student learning will help schools. In fact, Harlan said, ELT is one of three key initiatives that will turnaround low-performing schools; high-quality instruction and a clearly articulated intervention system are the other two. Harlan explained:

*Kids will never catch up . . . if you’re not looking at extended time, whether that be after school programs, whether that be summer school programs, whether that be full-day kindergarten, you’ll never make it. I think it’s probably one of three things that if you’re not doing, you’ll never turn around a school.*

District officials and school leaders generally agreed that ELT is an effective school improvement strategy, particularly as a tool for providing struggling students with additional instructional time and academic support targeted to their needs. “I believe [ELT] is an effective strategy,” said Principal Romero of Kirov Elementary. “We’re working to provide students with targeted instruction, instruction that’s differentiated to meet them where they’re at and move them forward.”

While the principals at all three case study schools had positive views about the effects of ELT in their schools, they also noted that ELT is only one component of their school’s improvement plan. Principal Clarkson at Santos High School made this point:

*I think [ELT] is a subset of other strategies that I believe are more important. I believe in the quality of instruction within the building and having a system of supports for kids, and [ELT] is just one of those systems of supports. I do not believe that it is the end all, be all.*

Clarkson further emphasized that for ELT to have a significant effect, it should be implemented alongside other school improvement efforts, such as enhancing the quality of classroom instruction and targeting interventions on struggling students.

Leaders of the ODE initiatives for SIGs, priority schools, and 21st CCLC grants said they work closely together to coordinate their programs. However, because the program requirements differ somewhat, these leaders had different views about which students
their programs should primarily serve and whether their programs should expand learning time during or outside the regular school day.

Leaders involved with SIG and priority schools perceive ELT to be for all students in the schools, rather than a select group of academically at-risk students. Furthermore, in SIG and priority schools, state leaders expect ELT to focus on expanding the traditional school day rather than focusing primarily on after-school activities, although they also recognized the importance of additional focused instruction beyond the expanded day for students who need academic interventions. These state officials said that SIG schools, in particular, reported making better use of time during the day and adding more minutes to the school day, compared with priority schools that were not SIG schools. The success of SIG schools may be due both to the firmer requirements for SIG schools and to the extra funding these schools receive.

Ready said 21st CCLC programs, which currently offer services outside the regular school day, often serve the most academically needy students, rather than every child in the school. All grantees aimed to provide opportunities for academic enrichment, including tutoring, to help students in low-performing schools meet state academic standards. In practice, he also said that Oregon's 21st CCLC services vary by grantee in terms of how many students they serve and which students get priority. Ready explained:

*Particularly within those schools [with limited funds], even though [a project manager] might be able to offer an array of things that would interest all the students, they don’t have adequate money . . . And so, as a result, they try to serve those students who need help the most. Whether they use the Response to Intervention model or other means of assessing the needs of the students, [those struggling academically] tend to go to the head of the line, and those students are the ones they serve. So that’s who we are talking about—the students who are in most need.*
References

