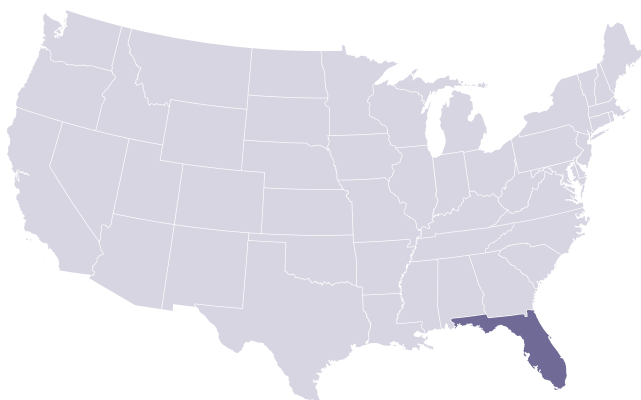




Florida

State Policy Brief
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Julie Corbett
for the Center on School
Turnaround at WestEd



<http://centeronschoolturnaround.org>

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State Policy Brief March 2015

A brief prepared by Julie Corbett of Corbett Education Consulting LLC for the Center on School Turnaround at WestEd.

This brief is one in a series highlighting state policies, regulations, practices, laws, or other tools intended to create the necessary conditions for school and/or district turnaround. Each brief includes an overview of the relevant turnaround tool, its development process, its impact, and lessons learned that could assist other education agencies interested in enacting something similar. The briefs will also include relevant resources, such as the text from state codes, interviews with state education leaders, news articles, state board of education meeting minutes, bill status updates, and legislative amendments.



FLORIDA



Policy Brief on School Turnaround – Florida (March 2015)

I. Overview of Policy

In 2012, Florida passed a state policy that requires the 100 elementary schools (called the Low-100) with the lowest reading scores to add an additional hour of literacy instruction to their regular school day (West & Vickers, 2014). The statute requires that the additional time be used for literacy, and the schools and districts have considerable flexibility in how they implement the policy, including the timing, approach, and professional development of staff. The state recently expanded the program to the 300 lowest-performing (in reading) elementary schools, but this brief focuses on the design and impact of the initial policy.

- ◆ Timing—Schools have flexibility as to when the additional hour is added (before, during, at the end of the day, or in some other combination). Analysis of the first year of implementation at the 100 elementary schools demonstrated the following use of time:
 - 38% added time during the day,
 - 39% added time at the end of the day,
 - 15% varied the timing, and
 - 7% added time at the beginning of the day (West & Vickers, 2014).
- ◆ Approach—Schools also receive autonomy in how the additional hour is structured. The additional time for literacy instruction could be used for whole or small group work, guided instruction, vocabulary work, or individual differentiation.
- ◆ Professional Development—Schools are able to determine their own professional development needs and training. The professional development opportunities could include networking for sharing practices amongst staff, coaching supports from the central office, or school-based professional development designed to create materials to be used during the added time. Analysis of the first year of implementation demonstrated that 81% of schools provided training, and 45% provided additional teacher planning time (West & Vickers, 2014).

The extended hour is usually funded from the state’s Supplemental Academic Instruction (SAI) line item and the district’s research-based reading instruction allocation,¹ and the hour must include:

- ◆ Research-based instruction;
- ◆ Instruction differentiated based on student reading proficiency;

¹ House, H 5101 er, bill text line 64

- ♦ Integrated phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension;
- ♦ Incorporated guided practice, error correction, and feedback; and,
- ♦ Integrated social studies, science, and mathematics-text reading; text discussion; and writing in response to reading (West & Vickers, 2014).

Schools are not provided additional funds specifically to implement the program but may allocate all or a portion of their SAI dollars to cover the costs of extended time.² If a district has several schools on the lowest-performing list, their SAI funds may not be sufficient to cover the additional costs. In this case, the district is responsible for covering any shortfall via reallocation of other discretionary funds.

Classroom instruction may only be delivered by teachers and reading specialists who are highly qualified to teach reading. The hiring of additional reading coaches is limited.³ In addition, the extra hour of literacy instruction is added to an already mandatory 90-minute literacy block required daily for all schools in Florida.

II. Development Process

This effort builds off previous state literacy work, including an initiative and SEA office—Just Read, Florida!—launched in 2001 to focus on reading and literacy (Florida Department of Education, <http://www.justreadflorida.com/>). The bill’s author, Republican Sen. David Simmons, based the concept on a reading program piloted in 2007–08 in four schools, which demonstrated strong student achievement results (Gewertz, 2014). The pilot was suggested by a school principal, who told Senator Simmons, “Just give me more seat time, and I can get excellent results” (D. Simmons, personal communication, June 20, 2014).

The Low-100 policy was introduced in January 2012 as part of annual budget appropriations, went through conference committee in February, passed by the house and the senate in March, and the governor signed it into law in April. The budget received almost unanimous passage in the senate but was slightly more controversial in the house.⁴

Despite being a statewide law, implementation required a change in the working conditions of teachers. In effect, local union negotiations were necessary and completed district-by-district. Most districts and unions agreed upon additional pay for the extra hour of time and allowed teachers an “opt out” clause and the right to transfer to a different school if they did not want to comply with the revised conditions. Teachers and their unions showed some initial pushback to the extended day, but after a year of implementation, many formerly critical teachers started to see results and that the program was effective (Gewertz, 2014; D. Simmons, personal communication, June 20, 2014).

² The SAI budget was increased overall, and all schools received additional SAI funding for the 2013-14 school year (D. Simmons, personal communication, June 20, 2014).

³ House Bill 501, bill text lines 707-9

⁴ House Bill 501

III. Impact

After one year of implementation, “three-quarters of the schools saw improved reading scores on the state’s standardized test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT. Seventy of the 100 schools earned their way off the lowest-performing list altogether” (Gerwertz, 2014, para. 2).

Florida’s government accountability office analyzed the first year of implementation to assess if students’ reading performance improved at the schools that implemented the additional hour. The study included an analysis of student scores as well as interviews with principals and found that 69% of schools moved off the low-performing list, while the remaining 31% of schools stayed on the low performance in literacy list (West & Vickers, 2014). In addition, 76% of schools demonstrated an increase of students reading at grade level (West & Vickers, 2014).

When compared to similar schools that did not implement the additional hour program, results were mixed. To support the program, approximately 20% of Low-100 schools demonstrated statistically significant results of students performing better than the control group. But, approximately 13% of the Low-100 schools demonstrated student performance lower than non-participating schools (West & Vickers, 2014).

In regard to the implementation flexibilities schools have, the analysis showed that the most successful schools added time at the end of the day (West & Vickers, 2014). Most schools provided some training, and about half gave teachers additional planning time. Neither strategy (additional training or planning time) demonstrated a positive impact on student outcomes (Gewertz, 2014; West & Vickers, 2014). The study did not include an analysis of the various instructional strategies that schools might have used during implementation.

The analysis also included surveys of principals, and 66% of principals believe the extra hour is effective (16% ineffective and 18% undecided). Regarding the goal of schools improving their A-F accountability grades, only 22 of the 100 schools improved their overall grades, but 70 of the schools improved their FCAT reading scores enough to move off the Low-100 list.⁵ In addition, after one year of implementation, 30 schools that moved off the low-performing list and were no longer required to include the extra hour are choosing to continue the additional hour (West & Vickers, 2014).

IV. Moving Implementation Forward

Several issues arose during the first year of implementation, including the timing of the release of the state lists and the need to plan for annual budgets and programs. Laurie Lee, the deputy director of the state education department’s Just Read, Florida! office, reflects that “schools have to scramble to set up reading interventions, since they don’t learn until July that they are on the list” (Gewertz, 2014, para. 11). In addition, since the list changes each year, it is difficult for schools and districts to plan programming and staffing for more than one year at a time (Gewertz, 2014).

While the initial legislative study on Florida’s implementation provided some analysis of the effectiveness of the program, further and more detailed analysis should be completed to assess the use of various instructional and training strategies. In addition, it would be useful to examine the quality of instruction of teachers and the outcomes their students demonstrated (i.e., what is the impact of additional time on students when receiving varying qualities of instruction? Is it the additional time or the improved instructional practice that impacts student learning?).

⁵ Reading proficiency and growth are two of several indicators used to determine the A-F accountability grades (Gewertz, 2014).

Palm Beach County saw particularly strong results with 15 of 16 schools moving off the Low-100 list within one year (Stainburn, 2014). Staff from the Florida Department of Education visited the district, which demonstrated particularly strong and statistically significant results, to find out more about their implementation choices, what was effective, what wasn't effective, and to learn lessons that might be applicable for statewide scaling (S. Foerster, personal communication, June 20, 2014).

Recently, Florida expanded the program from the 100 lowest-performing elementary schools (in reading) to the lowest 300. This expansion was supported by the results seen during the first year of implementation. The expansion to 300 schools will be closely monitored, and future accountability studies will likely occur (D. Simmons, personal communication, June 20, 2014). Senator Simmons states, "I need to be honest with myself and my colleagues, we're [spending millions of dollars] and we need to make sure it works."

V. Lessons Learned From Florida

- ◆ Ensure quality instruction. The bill includes the provision that teachers must be highly qualified to teach reading, but teachers should be assessed to determine if high qualifications correlate with highly effective instruction.
- ◆ Caution the amount of leeway provided to schools and districts. Flexibility allows a program and/or strategy to reflect student, teacher, and community needs, but too much flexibility may impact the fidelity of implementation. Some flexibility should be permitted to reflect unique approaches designed to meet individual school needs, yet strategies that demonstrate statistically significant results should be encouraged (i.e., schools and districts have the ability to determine when to add the additional hour, but preliminary research⁶ demonstrates that adding time to the end of the day was most effective).
- ◆ Be creative with implementation. The statute specifies that interdisciplinary learning is a goal, but there is limited information on the actual implementation and instruction. Additional years of implementation may result in stronger and more integrated strategies that link reading and literacy instruction to other learning.
- ◆ Hold districts accountable. Each district must submit a comprehensive reading plan to the state about how funds will be spent and what implementation strategies will be used. The plan should be designed with input from school and district personnel, teachers, and principals. The state education agency is tasked with monitoring and tracking implementation of each district plan and may include site visits to assess results and expenditures.⁷ That said, it is unclear if there are any clear consequences for not implementing the extended time if on the lowest-performing list (S. Foerster, personal communication, June 9, 2014; D. Simmons, personal communication, June 20, 2014).
- ◆ Regularly monitor for progress. The school, district, and state should monitor progress regularly to assess changes in student achievement and changes in adult practice. Detailed analysis should also be completed from the state level to assess if the extended time caused the improvements in student achievement or if growth was due to schools and districts assessing the efficacy of their programs and teachers.

⁶ Additional research of the year one results would be needed to determine statistically sound findings.

⁷ House Bill 501, bill text lines 872-5

- ♦ Review the timeline. When developing a policy, ensure that the timeline of various required steps make sense. For example, test results (which determine the list) are announced in late June or early July, and the policy states that the additional hour must be implemented the following school year. As a result, school principals and districts have 6-8 weeks to plan for implementation. A longer planning time frame would allow schools and districts to be more strategic and thoughtful about their approach, training required, staffing, and material acquisition (S. Foerster, personal communication, June 20, 2014).
- ♦ Weigh the cost. Implementing extended time is an extremely expensive strategy and may be cost prohibitive for many states and districts. In addition, extended time itself is not a silver bullet. Instead, it is more important to focus on what happens during that time. Additional time in a subpar program or with subpar instruction will only produce subpar results.

V. References

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