



Elementary and Secondary Education Act Flexibility Waivers

Are States Using Flexibility to Expand Learning Time in Schools?

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Introduction and summary

The Center for American Progress previously examined the extent to which states applying for first-round Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, flexibility waivers in 2012 planned to expand in-school learning time to turn around low-performing schools. Our examination specifically reviewed state plans for explicit details about how states planned to use ESEA flexibility waivers and the 21st Century Community Learning Center, or 21st CCLC, optional waiver for comprehensive school redesign to add time for student learning and teacher collaboration and planning. At the time, only 11 states—Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Tennessee—had approved applications from the U.S. Department of Education and were free from some of the most taxing parts of the No Child Left Behind law, or NCLB.¹ In return for this flexibility, the Department of Education asked states to develop plans addressing three areas of reform: setting college- and career-ready expectations for all students; developing differentiated recognition, accountability, and support systems; and supporting effective instruction and leadership.² Our review found that most states did not take purposeful approaches to restructuring time in school.³ In fact, of the eight states that asked for flexibility in using the 21st CCLC grants, only three—Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma—provided insight into how they planned to use this funding differently.⁴ As of September 1, 41 states, the District of Columbia, and a group of California school districts had been approved for ESEA flexibility.⁵ Of those with approved waivers, 24 states requested the option to use 21st CCLC program funds during the school day for in-school expanded learning time.

Expanded learning time has great potential to boost student achievement and close achievement gaps, but time alone is not a panacea. It must be well planned and part of a comprehensive reform—exactly the kind of change that “priority schools,” the lowest-performing schools in a state, need. Our current analysis reveals, however, that most states continued to submit ESEA flexibility applica-

tions that did not address how more time in school could strategically support school turnaround efforts. It should be noted that the lack of these details does not necessarily mean that states are not doing this, but it is not clear either way. It also does not necessarily mean that a robust state plan for increased learning time translates into strong execution. State plans, however, should reflect their intentions for accountability and transparency purposes. Furthermore, state plans serve as guidance for the Department of Education’s monitoring process, and more detail and documentation is critical to the process.

This report provides an up-to-date review of states’ ESEA flexibility plans and assesses the extent, if any, to which states have strategically thought about how expanded learning time can support school turnaround efforts. In doing so, we examined the “Principle 2: State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support” section of all state plans for submission windows one through three. Specifically, our analysis focused on the extent to which each state plan outlined its intent to either use more time as part of its strategy to turn around its lowest-performing schools or redesign the school day to reach student-achievement goals. Among states that requested flexible use of 21st CCLC funds, we looked for details about its planned use. State plans were grouped in part based on the level of detail provided in three research-based building blocks for the effective use of increased learning time for core academics, enrichment opportunities, and teacher collaboration. States that provided the most detailed information were considered “standouts.” Only four state plans met these criteria: Connecticut, Colorado, New York, and Massachusetts. Six out of 42 states demonstrated a commitment to increased learning time but did not provide enough detail. The majority of states—32 out of 42—did not think strategically about how increased learning time could complement school turnaround plans and increase academic achievement.

As a result of this analysis, we propose we propose state- and local-level recommendations that will help make certain that expanded learning time is well planned and intentional. Specifically, we recommend that:

- States develop guidelines promoting high-quality expanded learning time
- States develop a guide for school districts and principals that want to implement expanded learning time

- States encourage schools that choose to expand learning time to add 300 additional hours to the standard school-year schedule, allowing more time for the three key areas: academics, enrichment programming, and teacher collaboration
- States outline how they will use their 21st CCLC funding to increase learning time.
- Districts and schools implement additional time strategically through an intentional, one-year planning period if possible
- Districts and schools use data analyses to strategically implement more time
- Districts monitor schedule redesign

ESEA flexibility overview

The Department of Education invited states to apply for flexibility from the most impractical or ineffective NCLB requirements in 2011, such as ensuring all students are proficient in math and reading by 2014. In exchange for relief from these onerous requirements, states must develop plans to implement education reforms, set high standards for all students, and close achievement gaps. Four principles guide ESEA flexibility: college- and career-ready expectations for all students; state-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; support for effective instruction and leadership; and reduction of duplication and unnecessary burden.⁶

The Department of Education turnaround principles are as follows:

- Providing strong leadership
- Ensuring that all teachers are effective and able to improve instruction
- Redesigning the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration
- Strengthening the school's instructional program based on student needs and ensuring that the instructional program is research based, rigorous, and aligned with state academic-content standards
- Using data to inform instruction and ensure continuous improvement
- Establishing a school environment that improves school safety, discipline, and students' social, emotional, and health needs
- Providing ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement

Source: U.S. Department of Education, "ESEA Flexibility Policy Document," available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html> (last accessed December 2013).

Through ESEA flexibility, states are required to outline interventions in their lowest-performing schools—classified as priority schools—aligned with seven turnaround principles that the Department of Education established in 2011. The total number of priority schools in a state includes at least 5 percent of the Title I schools, Title I-participating or Title I-eligible high schools with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent, and schools receiving School Improvement Grant, or SIG, funds.⁷ In addition, states must address their “focus schools”—the schools with the largest within-school achievement gaps between subgroups. At the high school level, a school is classified as a focus school if it has the largest within-school gaps in graduation rates or low graduation rates or is a Title I high school with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a number of years. The total number of focus schools in a state must account for at least 10 percent of the Title I schools.⁸

ESEA flexibility also gives states the discretion to tap into the 21st CCLC federal funding stream to support expanded learning time. Expanded learning time, as defined by the Department of Education for purposes of ESEA flexibility, is the time by which a district or school “extends its normal school day, week, or year to provide additional instruction or educational programs for all students beyond the State-mandated requirements for the minimum number of hours in a school day, days in a school week, or days or weeks in a school year.”⁹ This change gives local school districts and schools the flexibility to choose expanded learning time for all students—as well as for afterschool and summer programming, to which the program had previously been constrained. The 21st CCLC optional waiver represents a key policy shift for the program.

President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have encouraged—and, in some cases, required—that schools reimagine this country’s outdated vision for how and when we educate children, with ESEA flexibility being their most recent endeavor. With the administration’s steadfast support, states, districts, and schools have taken notice: As of fall 2012, more than 1,000 expanded learning time schools, serving more than 520,000 students in 36 states and the District of Columbia, had been identified.¹⁰ Some small- and large-scale expanded learning time initiatives, such as public schools in Chicago and Washington, D.C., have likely increased these numbers. This means that more than 520,000 students are attending schools that are using a longer school day or year as a method for boosting overall student achievement. Likewise, five states—Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Tennessee—have joined to launch the Time for Innovation Matters in Education, or TIME, Collaborative. By leveraging state and federal resources, including the new flexibility afforded by the ESEA waiver process, these states have agreed to add 300 hours of learning time for all students in participating schools.¹¹

Research supports expanded learning time

Increasing the amount of time students spend in school focused on core academics and enrichment is gaining momentum and presents an unprecedented opportunity for school districts and schools to redesign schools and close achievement gaps by implementing high-quality expanded learning time. The potential impacts of expanded learning time are clear: A study of academic performance in Massachusetts schools found that charter schools outperform traditional schools. This difference is based in part on a significantly longer school day in charter schools, an average of about 62 more days per year.¹² A meta-analysis of the effects of longer school days or years on student outcomes found that adding time was associated with improved student outcomes, noting stronger effects for schools serving large populations of at-risk students.¹³

A recent analysis of charter schools in New York City sought to identify those elements within schools that had the greatest impact on academic outcomes. The research determined that charter schools with at least 25 percent more instructional time, or at least 300 more hours per year, and high-dosage tutoring boasted higher gains in English language arts and math compared to traditional public schools.¹⁴ A separate study of New York City charter schools sought to identify specific school policies that were associated with students' outcomes. Researchers found that students who attended charter schools with a much longer school year performed better on state assessments, compared to their peers who attended charter schools with more traditional school-year lengths.¹⁵ What's more, researchers identified total learning time as one of the strongest predictors of student outcomes among the list of school policies identified.¹⁶

Finally, a recent study from the National Bureau of Economic Research used Programme for International Student Assessment data to explore how instructional time and classroom quality affect academic achievement. Through empirical analyses, it found that there is "strong evidence in favor of the notion that additional time raises achievement using a series of specifications and measures of instructional time."¹⁷ It further noted that the extent to which students benefited from additional time varied based on the quality of the classroom environment.¹⁸

The finding above highlights our next point: More time is not the only element that led to an increase in academic achievement in these schools. Indeed, expanded learning time is only successful when it is part of a more comprehensive reform that addresses all of the important factors associated with turning around a low-performing school. As noted in a recent report, successful expanded learning time schools are not simply “adding time to compensate for what they lack; they are integrating time into an overall model for successful teaching and learning.”¹⁹ This is why examining state plans for increasing time in school is important. States, districts, and schools must think strategically about how more time in school can complement school turnaround plans, or they risk simply adding more time to the school day without making substantial changes to how that time is used.

How we rated the states

We examined the “Principle 2: State-Developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support” section of all state plans for submission windows one through three. Our analysis focused specifically on the extent to which each state plan outlined how it intended to either use more time as part of its strategy to turn around its lowest-performing schools or redesign the school day to reach student-achievement goals. In addition, we looked at details for addressing the new flexible use of the 21st CCLC funds among states that selected this option.

Similar to our 2012 brief, each state plan was evaluated on its inclusion of three research-based building blocks for effective use of increased learning time: core academics, enrichment opportunities, and teacher collaboration. While the inclusion of these basic building blocks does not represent a comprehensive approach to increasing learning time, we view them as the minimum requirements for successful expanded learning time schools. Each building block is also included in the Department of Education’s definition of high-quality expanded learning time.²⁰

States were also grouped based on the level of detail they provided regarding the use of time in schools. To be considered a “standout” state, the application had to include details on each of the three building blocks—core academics, enrichment, and teacher collaboration—and allow focus schools to expand learning time. Standouts also explained how they planned to use flexibility for their 21st CCLC funding.

States in the “committed but missing details” group demonstrated a commitment to adding more time to the school calendar but did not provide information addressing each building block or, in some cases, provided details on one topic but not another. States in the “lacks strategic thinking” group did not provide enough detail on the basic building blocks for effective use of time and lacked clear thinking about how districts and schools should wisely use more time.

It should be noted that states were required to address the seven turnaround principles listed previously, including redesigning the school day or year, in applications and were not given credit in our analyses for plans that stated that “schools will implement plans aligned with the seven turnaround principles.” Similarly, according to ESEA flexibility guidance, priority schools implementing one of the SIG models satisfied the turnaround-principle implementation requirement and were also not given credit for stating that, “SIG schools are required to increase learning time.” What made some states standouts or “committed but missing details” was that their plans went beyond including boilerplate language in their applications. Standout states either provided specific details about how more time should be used or offered examples of how expanded learning time could be implemented at a school.²¹

Standout states

Four states were considered standouts, which means that—similar to our 2012 review—most states did not present a clear schedule-redesign plan. Joining Massachusetts,²² which was the only standout in 2012, are Colorado, Connecticut, and New York. Each state outlined how schedule redesign or more time in school could be used and provided several examples that illustrated intervention strategies in action, including how a district might implement them.

Standout states provided detailed information, illustrative examples, and specified:

- More time spent on core academics, enrichment, and teacher collaboration
- More time in focus schools as an option
- A request for the 21st CCLC optional waiver

In New York, the state department of education developed quality indicators that merged the federal Department of Education’s turnaround principles and SIG interventions to lead districts and schools through the process of developing improvement plans. This provided districts and schools with a clear understanding of what was expected of them. Many states did something similar, but what sets New York apart is that it clearly outlined its expectations for increased learning time and described the accompanying supports that the New York State Education Department will provide to ensure proper implementation. For example, New York requires schools to “plan for additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration aligned with the school’s overall academic focus” and stipulates that “additional time is used to accelerate learning in core academic subjects, by making meaningful improvements to the quality of instruction in identified areas of need.”²³ In support, the New York School Turnaround Office will provide schools with a selection of educational consultants to help them meet these goals.²⁴

Similarly, Connecticut’s plan acknowledges that the traditional 180-day school year limits opportunities for many students who are furthest behind. As the state department of education assesses districts’ turnaround plans for their priority schools, it will examine whether the “proposed additional time will lead to improvements in student achievement by providing more time for core academic pursuits with opportunities for individualized support, teacher collaboration to strengthen instruction, and high-quality enrichment.”²⁵ In an effort to move away from a seat time-based approach to teaching and learning toward a competency-based approach, Connecticut’s plan also provided several examples of effective practices and examples of expanded learning time.²⁶

We found in our 2012 analysis that Colorado’s plan lacked strategic thinking. Originally, the plan provided few details about using time differently, and Colorado did not request the 21st CCLC optional waiver. Its revised plan, however, focused primarily on how it will use the optional flexibility to turn around low-performing schools and expand learning opportunities, which could include more time in school. Colorado—now part of the TIME Collaborative—is one of the states that is leading the way with respect to using increased learning time as a strategy to improve student achievement. Colorado resubmitted its flexibility plan in November 2012.²⁷ See the text box below.

Most improved state plan: Colorado

Colorado made two notable improvements to its ESEA flexibility plan: It requested 21st CCLC flexibility and launched an Expanded Learning Opportunities, or ELO, vision and plan in partnership with the Colorado Legacy Foundation, which is a nonprofit that works in partnership with the Colorado Department of Education and public education stakeholders to accelerate bold improvements in student achievement through innovation, collaboration, and capacity building. The plan stipulated that “critical to the success of the ELO vision is thinking differently about how we use time, resources, people, and technology to personalize learning.” It outlined how it will use the 21st CCLC grants to “transform schools into high-quality expanded learning time schools based on the examples of the highest-performing expanded time schools.” It also clearly defined what high-quality expanded learning time schools were, stating that they were schools that:

- Added more time by significantly expanding the school day, school week, or school year to increase learning time for all students
- Used the additional time to support a well-rounded education that includes time for academics and enrichment activities
- Provided additional time for teacher collaboration, common planning, and professional development

- Partnered with one or more outside organizations, such as a nonprofit organization, with demonstrated experience in improving student achievement
- Examined student data frequently to identify individual student needs and better tailor instruction
- Engaged students and leveraged community partnerships—including better integrating partners into the school day when they may have previously been relegated to nonschool hours, technology, educators, and time within and beyond the classroom and the typical school day

Once awarded, the 21st CCLC optional waiver will be used to braid multiple resources for expanded learning opportunities. The partnership has also developed a resource bank available on the Colorado Legacy Foundation website that provides educators with information, tools, videos, and technical support to help districts and schools “transform the learning experience to better engage students and improve outcomes.”

Sources: Colorado Department of Education, “Colorado ESEA Flexibility Request” (November 2012), available at http://www2.ed.gov/policy/eseaflex/approved-requests/co_amend121912.pdf; Colorado Legacy Foundation, “Next Generation Learning,” available at <http://colegacy.org/initiatives/nextgen-learning> (last accessed October 2013).

Committed but missing detail

Six of the 42 states’ flexibility plans demonstrate a strong commitment to increased learning time but do not provide enough detail to make them standout states. The two highlighted here submitted strong plans addressing most but not all of the topics that would have made them standout states. In Oregon’s ESEA waiver application, for example, it stated that priority schools will be required to examine and redesign their daily, weekly, and/or yearly schedules to increase student learning time in core subjects, focusing on an increase in the subjects where students have the greatest need. In addition, school staff will be afforded addi-

tional time to collaborate to align curricula and activities in both core and noncore subject areas.²⁸ While the commitment to expanded learning time is there, no additional information or examples were provided.

Similarly, Florida makes a strong statement about its commitment to extending the school day, even providing some details about an early-alert system designed to address students' needs immediately. Florida provides Supplemental Academic Intervention funding that is initially distributed based on the estimated number of students needing an extended school year program. Funds are provided at the beginning of the school year, allowing schools to implement an academic intervention as soon as a student begins to struggle. Florida also addresses teachers' time, stating that a district's plan for priority schools must make certain that there is more time for teacher collaboration. Florida's plan, however, does not address more time for enrichment programming.

In addition to Florida and Oregon, Georgia, Kansas, Ohio, and Oklahoma were included in this category, demonstrating a commitment to increased learning time on some but not all of the building blocks.

Lacked strategic thinking

The majority of states—32 out of 42—missed the opportunity to think strategically about how redesigning the school calendar could complement school turnaround plans and increase academic achievement. As previously noted, states were required to submit plans in their waiver applications about the interventions they will implement to boost student achievement in priority schools. These interventions must be aligned with the seven turnaround principles—one of which is redesigning the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration.²⁹ As such, each state plan includes use of more time in their applications, but most do not go beyond stating that improvement plans will be aligned with turnaround principles and/or SIG turnaround models.

Furthermore, these state plans do not include details about how districts or schools could increase time for academics, enrichment, and teacher collaboration. This is disappointing because to be most effective, expanded learning time must be a component of whole-school reform that integrates all of the reforms necessary—such as data, personalized learning, and teacher collaboration—to make every minute count, not simply the addition of an afterschool program onto the existing day.

Missouri’s plan, for example, states that, at a minimum, school districts with priority schools are required to implement the turnaround principles and listed “redesign the school day, week, or year to provide increased time for learning and professional collaboration” as one of the seven.³⁰ Unfortunately, the plan does not elaborate any further. It does not specify how the additional time should be used. It does not provide examples outlining the state’s expectations for how districts and schools should redesign the school day. Further, Missouri did not request the 21st CCLC optional waiver, which would have opened up previously restricted funds to help schools increase learning time.

Similarly, Virginia’s plan states that “meaningful interventions designed to improve the academic achievement of students in priority schools must be aligned with all of the following ‘turnaround principles’ and selected with family and community input,” which included “redesigning the school day, week, or year to include additional time for student learning and teacher collaboration.”³¹ Virginia requested the 21st CCLC optional waiver but provided no details about its intended use. Like other states that fall into the “lacked strategic thinking” category, Virginia’s vision for expanded learning time, as described in its ESEA flexibility plan, was not forward thinking. It did not go beyond restating what was already required to be included in the application.

More time in school is a promising strategy to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps, but additional time only has the potential to improve academic achievement if the schedule is redesigned purposefully to effectively use time for both teachers and students. It is impossible to know why so many states neglected to request the 21st CCLC optional waiver, but not doing so could limit schools’ ability to meet some of the increased learning time requirements. The Obama administration’s decision to open up these previously restricted funds represents an unprecedented opportunity to expand learning time for all students, allowing more time for academics, enrichment, and teacher collaboration. States that did not request the optional waiver missed an opportunity to give schools more flexibility and funds to lengthen the learning day where it is most needed.

Addressing the expanded learning time building blocks

The push for more time for student learning is especially appropriate as states implement the Common Core State Standards. The new standards are more rigorous than what previously existed in many states, and it will take a considerable amount of time for students—many of whom are already behind—to grapple with the tougher requirements being implemented this school year and next. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, for example, conducted a comprehensive state-by-state analysis of how the Common Core standards compared to the previous state standards. Their analysis found that the Common Core standards are superior to 39 states’ math standards and 37 states’ English standards.³² The Education Trust recently assessed state track records in raising student achievement to determine where states stand before Common Core implementation. Their analysis concluded that the “Common Core State Standards have the potential to dramatically raise the rigor of instruction—and the level of achievement—in schools across the United States. But these standards will also demand more of our students and teachers than has ever been demanded before.”³³

Moreover, by definition, priority schools are the lowest-performing schools and in need of the most help. Teachers and principals at these schools are often overwhelmed by the amount of substantial change that needs to happen to improve student achievement. More time in school, when used wisely, has great potential to make this transition period easier for students. It would only make sense for states to think strategically about time use and consider ways to increase the amount of time students in these struggling schools have to learn.

Although most states fall into the “lacked strategic thinking” category, there are some bright spots. Many states emphasized one aspect of expanded learning time, as outlined in the sections below. In each section that follows, we highlight a few noteworthy state plans under the expanded learning time building blocks that guided our state ratings. In order to illustrate how a variety of states approached the core principles, we included states based on the quality of the description. We also wanted to highlight a variety of states.

More time in priority schools

The Recovery School District, or RSD, schools in Louisiana meet for 179 school days with a longer day. Students must demonstrate mastery on state standardized tests or attend an additional three weeks of class during the summer, during which time they participate in an accelerated instructional program to move students to grade level and prepare them to retake the tests. RSD charter schools have the autonomy to set their own calendars and provide students with many opportunities for additional instructional time, including a longer school day, Saturday school programs, or a year-round calendar, among others.

Priority schools in Wisconsin, which are primarily located in Milwaukee, must add a minimum of 300 hours of instruction for all students. According to the state plan, the increased learning time will be gradually implemented, with all schools extending the learning day by the 2015-16 school year. Schools may choose to extend the day through alternative schedules, an extended school day, or Saturday school.³⁴

The Hawaii Department of Education did not specify the amount of time priority schools must extend the school day but emphasized that rigorous change to the use of time during the school day and year must be implemented.³⁵ Improvement plans for priority schools must include a time analysis, a research-based strategy for educator collaboration, and class time dedicated to innovative methods of delivering instruction.³⁶

More time for enrichment activities

One of the biggest advantages to expanded learning time is that it closes the “access to enrichment gap” for all students—the disparity between low- and high-income students in access to quality enrichment activities such as music lessons, art, community service, and sports.³⁷ When expanded learning time is implemented as a complete redesign of the school day and lengthens the amount of time all students spend in school, students have opportunities to fully participate in enrichment activities. With a longer school day, students have more time to explore a variety of interests from soccer to science experiments to music and art—the possibilities are endless.

Perhaps one of the more disappointing aspects of flexibility plans is that many states neglected to think about how more time in school could be used to enhance these enrichment opportunities and complement core academics. Only 10 state plans specifically mention enrichment programming as part of a turnaround plan for priority or focus schools. One of those 10 states, Louisiana, allows for off-campus internships and career-preparation programs during the school day.³⁸ Unlike many other states, Georgia’s plan specifies that focus schools must provide additional learning time for students, specifying that time must be used for academics, enrichment, or teacher collaboration.³⁹

The states leading the way—Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York—all specified that expanded learning time in school needed to include more time for core academics and enrichment. In New York, for example, the state’s implementation requirements specify that additional time should be used to offer enrichment opportunities that “connect to state standards, build student skills and interests, and deepen student engagement in school/learning in identified areas of need.”⁴⁰ The Massachusetts plan provides illustrative examples of how enrichment could be used for academic improvement:

*Students are provided with a broad array of enrichment opportunities that deepen their engagement in school in areas including the arts, foreign languages, hands-on science, business, community service learning, and leadership. This type of intervention will help to foster trusting relationships and a sense of belonging for students; engage them in activities and routines intended to reinforce school values, behaviors and attitudes necessary for success such as hard work, perseverance and responsibility; improve the transition from middle to high school; and promote youth leadership, 21st century skill development, and college and career readiness.*⁴¹

More time for teacher planning and collaboration

The effective use of time for teacher professional development and collaboration is prominent in New Jersey’s plan. In priority schools that fail to “effectively utilize time for improving instruction and achievement for all students,” Regional Achievement Centers will help teachers learn strategies for working with English language learners and special education students; understand the Common Core State Standards; and develop and use common assessment data to inform their teaching practices and differentiate instruction.⁴²

In Georgia, providing additional time during the school day for teacher collaboration and planning is non-negotiable for priority and focus schools.⁴³ In focus schools, “time during the regular school day for teachers to collaboratively plan instruction to address the content of the [Common Core Georgia Performance Standards] and student learning needs” is mandated. The directive ensures that regular-education teachers have scheduled time to collaborate with special-education teachers and English language-learner specialists.⁴⁴

With the goal of “staff success” in mind, Hawaii’s plan states that a research-based strategy and proven best practice to “maximize time for dedicated educator collaboration, data teams, professional development, and class time dedicated to innovative methods of delivering instruction” can be used.⁴⁵ It also states that lengthening the school day in ways that result in increased time for innovative methods of delivering instruction is an option.⁴⁶

More time in focus schools

In general, state plans do not mandate a one-size-fits-all approach for closing achievement gaps in focus schools. In most cases, expanded learning time is one option of many. In Maine, for example, focus schools that do not demonstrate progress during the first two years will be required to address all seven turnaround principles, of which increasing the amount of time students spend in school is one.⁴⁷ In Florida, focus schools in their third consecutive year must increase instructional time by 300 hours for all students.⁴⁸

Oregon’s approach does not require focus schools to expand the school day unless it is deemed necessary by the school to improve student achievement. It does specify, however, that if schools increase learning time, focus schools need to put in place policies and practices that “will provide needed supports so that students stay on track to graduate, including opportunities for extended learning time in ways that match student schedules and providing appropriately leveled and relevant learning tasks designed to maximize student engagement.”⁴⁹ Focus schools will also be required to redesign or structure their schedules to provide plenty of time for teacher professional development, peer and team collaboration, continuous self-reflection, and ongoing study of research and evidence-based practice in their content areas.⁵⁰

Repurposing the 21st CCLC optional waiver

The 24 states that requested the optional 21st CCLC waiver generally did not provide specific details in their plans about how they intended to use those funds. A few notable exceptions include Oregon’s plan, which says that the optional waiver would be used to “expand ideas about where, when, and how learning occurs.”⁵¹ Its comprehensive approach will include wraparound services, community stakeholders, students, and families. It does not specify that the funds will be used to expand the school day but rather “will enhance opportunities to unify all stakeholders, youth development programs, non-profits, and business, to provide schools with additional technical expertise, human capital and funding to support and enhance student achievement.”⁵²

Mississippi will use the optional 21st CCLC waiver to “support expanded learning time during the school day in addition to activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session.”⁵³ It intends to work with 21st CCLC grantees to take advantage of this flexibility to increase enrichment for students while also providing teachers with time for collaboration. Several respondents to its 21st CCLC practitioners survey supported the state’s decision to apply for the optional waiver.⁵⁴ When asked, “Do you think it would benefit the students of Mississippi to apply for the 21st CCLC/ESEA waiver?”, one respondent said, “YES – research shows more attention to academics produces better academic scores and that should be reason enough to offer additional opportunities for learning.” Another said, “Yes because the additional funds will benefit students who are not able to attend afterschool tutorial services.” Yet another said, “Yes, because this would allow for more time for remediation and tutoring. The afterschool programs only last three hours and some of this time is devoted to housekeeping tasks.”

Oklahoma provides a detailed description of how it intends to use 21st CCLC funds for priority schools. Priority schools will be allowed to amend their grant applications to use a “limited” percentage of 21st CCLC funds for extended learning time, aligned with guidance provided by the state and based on a needs assessment. Any changes must be approved by the state. It also includes a detailed and specific list of seven practices that must be included in extended learning time: school-community partnerships, engaged learning, family engagement, prepared staff, intentional programming, student participation and access, and ongoing assessment and improvement.⁵⁵

Conclusions and recommendations

ESEA flexibility provides states, school districts, and schools with an added layer of support, and these efforts should be coordinated to be efficient and effective. Unfortunately, most state plans do not provide enough details to ascertain how more time will be used. What's more, many state plans do little more than affirm that supports and interventions for priority schools will be “aligned with the seven turnaround principles” and list all seven, which include redesigning the school day, week, or year for more instruction time.

ESEA flexibility also opens up the 21st CCLC funding stream for in-school expanded learning time. States could have used the ESEA flexibility application process as an opportunity to think strategically about how time could be used to support turnaround efforts in priority and focus schools. Unfortunately, the majority of states did not. Poor or no planning and improper implementation of expanded learning time can hinder the positive impact that more time in school can have on student achievement. When implemented as part of school-wide improvement efforts, however, expanded learning time is a promising method for turning around the lowest-performing schools and closing both achievement and access-to-enrichment gaps.

In our 2012 analysis of first-round waivers, only Massachusetts met our standards as a standout state. Our current analysis finds that many states have continued to neglect the opportunity to fully integrate expanded learning time into school turnaround plans. As we stated in our 2012 analysis, “Increasing learning time in school is easy, but using additional time wisely is hard. ... [States] would be wise to keep thinking about meaningful schedule redesign as they work to implement intervention strategies, because after all, the clock is ticking.”⁵⁶

For accountability and transparency purposes, state plans should be more specific and detail how they plan to support and implement a longer school day. This ensures that schools are legitimately redesigning the current school schedule, rather than tacking on time here or there or simply doing more of the same.

As such, we offer the following recommendations to help states better support districts and schools that are currently implementing an expanded day. Many of these recommendations were offered after our first review in 2012 but are still important today.

- **States should develop guidelines promoting high-quality expanded learning time.** States should create clearly defined expectations and guidelines that help districts and schools think about schedule redesign at the local level. These guidelines should allow flexibility so that schools and districts redesign the school calendar to fit their specific student needs. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, along with one of its partners, Mass 2020, provides a strong example of providing guidance and expectations for districts and schools. The framework outlines 58 expectations centered around eight goals for expanded learning time.⁵⁷ States that do not have the capacity to provide these tools should consider hiring an outside organization with extensive experience implementing in-school expanded learning time.
- **States should develop a guide for school districts and principals that want to implement expanded learning time.** Specifically, the guide should help school districts and principals identify tools to conduct a time audit, use the results of that time audit to address the schools' academic goals, and encourage the use of school-wide data to help school districts and principals determine how and where community partners can support school-improvement plans. This will create authentic partnerships that will ultimately benefit students' academic and nonacademic needs.
- **States should encourage schools to add 300 additional hours to the standard school schedule to allow more time for the three key areas: academics, enrichment programming, and teacher collaboration.** Research and good practices demonstrate that more time is necessary for high-poverty students and schools to see significant results. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the additional time for students and teachers, the schedule redesign must incorporate more time for core academics, enrichment activities, and teacher collaboration.⁵⁸
- **States need to outline how they will use their 21st CCLC funding to increase learning time.** This should also include a list of allowable expenses for districts and schools to use these funds. This funding was previously restricted to voluntary activities and programming outside of normal school hours, such as before or after school and during the summer. This welcomed flexibility allows states, districts,

and schools to use 21st CCLC money to fund the programs that best fit the needs of their students—whether by adding time outside of school hours or lengthening the school day or year. In addition to the substantive guidance that states should be providing for all expanded learning time schools, states should also help districts and schools determine which programs best suit the needs of their students and ensure 21st CCLC funds are used effectively and efficiently.

- **Districts and schools must implement additional time strategically through an intentional, one-year planning period if possible.** Increasing the amount of time students spend in school needs to be well planned, part of a whole-school reform effort, and supported by technical assistance at all levels of government—federal, state, and local. When implemented as part of school-wide improvement efforts, such as those happening in priority and focus schools, expanded learning time is a proven method for turning around the lowest-performing schools and closing both achievement and access-to-enrichment gaps.
- **Districts and schools must use data analyses to strategically implement more time.** Simply adding more time to the school schedule without specific purpose risks doing more of the same and is less likely to impact student achievement. As noted in our 2012 issue brief, districts and schools should analyze data to assess student weaknesses and then set short- and long-term goals to address those needs. Schedule redesign should be aligned to those goals, and the incorporation of additional time should be deliberate.
- **Districts should monitor schedule redesign.** As with any new intervention strategy, schedule redesign often requires adjustments. Districts should require schools to continuously assess if the additional time is helping students and teachers achieve their goals. Schools must be willing to make adjustments as necessary. Districts and schools should commit to performance agreements with the state that set goals for student achievement and other outcomes over a three-year period.

Expanded learning time has great potential to boost student achievement and close both the achievement and access-to-enrichment gaps. It cannot do this if it is not part of a more comprehensive reform effort. The National Center on Time & Learning, which has done extensive research on this topic, identified 30 high-achieving, high-poverty schools with longer school days and years to study how each one used more time to increase student achievement. It developed a set of eight effective strategies implemented across all 30 schools: make every minute

count, prioritize time according to focused learning goals, individualize learning time and instruction based on student needs, use time to build a school culture of high expectations and mutual accountability, use time to provide a well-rounded education, use time to prepare students for college and career, continuously strengthen instruction, and use time to relentlessly assess, analyze, and respond to student data.⁵⁹ As states, districts, and schools work to implement expanded learning time, they should keep these principles in mind.

ESEA flexibility did not specifically ask states to provide details about its plans to implement increased learning time, yet 10 states—four with more specific details and six with less specific details—did so. In some respect, this might provide insight into the state’s overall commitment to expanded learning time. Likewise, these details will provide a blueprint for moving forward and serve as the benchmark against which the success of expanded learning time can be measured. State plans should reflect states’ intentions for both accountability and transparency purposes. That being said, important next steps in analysis must be taken. Most importantly, we need to examine whether or not standout states stick with their intended plans, as well as the extent to which state plans that fell into the “lacked strategic thinking” category make strides toward high-quality implementation of expanded learning time—possibly surpassing standout states. It is our hope to continue monitoring states’ progress on this topic and informing the field on this important issue.

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Tiffany D. Miller is Associate Director for School Improvement at the Center for American Progress. Her work focuses on all aspects of school improvement, including federal K-12 policy issues such as School Improvement Grants, Race to the Top, and Investing in Innovation grants. She also focuses on educational innovation, including expanded learning time and high school reform.

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