

**A Piece of the Puzzle: Expanded Learning Time  
for School Improvement in Oregon**

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## Purpose

Under certain conditions, expanded learning time is a powerful tool for improving schools. Why, then, isn't it implemented more frequently? This paper combines results from two studies. In the first study, by Education Northwest, we examined school improvement planning documents from all 17 Oregon schools receiving federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) that required expanding learning time. In the second study, by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) at the George Washington University, we conducted in-depth state-, district-, and school-level interviews to examine expanding learning time in 3 of the 17 schools.

Increasing the time students spend learning has long been a strategy for improving schooling and recent quantitative and qualitative studies have shown positive results for expanding learning time (Edwards, 2012; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014). In the United States, expanding learning time is a key part of SIG (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The transformation model of school turnaround, which has been implemented by the majority of grantee schools, requires schools to expand learning time for all students (Hurlburt, Therriault, & Le Floch, 2012). However, many educators have questioned whether expanding learning time is possible given the challenge of lengthening teacher contract hours and keeping students on-site longer (Klein, 2010). This study takes a close look at expanded learning time in Oregon SIG schools, all of which used the transformation model (see Table 1 for required activities under the model).

## Theoretical Framework

A seminal 1994 report titled *Prisoners of Time* by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning (NECTL) called attention to the rigid policies across the United States that restricted the length of the school day and year and the use of time within that day. The Commission recommended altering the use of school time in "new, different, and better ways" to allow more time for student learning (NECTL, 1994, p. 8). Twenty years later, schools, districts, and states typically still have schedules that require students to attend school for uniform amounts of time. However, expanded learning time is increasingly seen as a way to restructure and improve instruction and learning for low-performing schools.

Many of these efforts to expand time have had positive impacts. A recent, rigorous meta-analysis found that when certified teachers expanded learning time, student performance in literacy and math increased, especially for students performing below standard (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014). State policies have contributed to these expanded learning time successes. A legislative review of Florida's Extra Hour Initiative, which required the 100 lowest performing schools in the state to increase their instructional day by one hour and to focus that time on reading instruction, found that almost three fourths of participating schools made gains in the number of students reading at grade level (West & Vickers, 2014).

Advocacy groups around the country are encouraging states, districts, and schools to expand time. The National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL), which is devoted to advocating for expanded learning time, tracks the increases in time (Edwards, 2012) and has published many case studies of the positive impact of expanded learning time (e.g., Chan, n.d.; Traphagen &

Zorich, 2013). Other research and advocacy groups also document the success of expanded learning time (EcoNorthwest & Chalkboard Project, 2008; Farbman, Goldberg, & Miller, 2014; Owen, 2012).

Given this knowledge about expanded learning time and the considerable federal investment in SIG, why aren't we seeing better educational outcomes? Implementing expanded learning time may not be easy. To explore challenges to implementation, this study examines expanded learning time in schools implementing SIG in Oregon, a state with one of the shortest school years in the United States (EcoNorthwest & Chalkboard Project, 2008).

## Methods

This qualitative study combines data from two previous studies: (1) a study by Education Northwest, which examined school improvement planning documents in all 17 Oregon schools receiving SIG and required to expand learning time and (2) a study by the CEP at the George Washington University, which conducted in-depth state-, district-, and school-level interviews to examine expanded learning time initiatives in 3 of the 17 schools. First, we examined the prevalence of the use of expanded learning time through school improvement planning documents. Then, we conducted semistructured interviews of state, district, and school officials to provide in-depth information about 3 of the 17 schools' efforts to expand learning time.

The study asked three questions:

- 1) How do state policies, practices, and supports relate to expanded learning time in Oregon, and to what extent do state officials believe expanded learning time is effective?
- 2) To what extent do school documents show that SIG schools are implementing expanded learning time relative to other activities required under SIG?
- 3) In selected SIG schools, what are officials' perceptions of the effectiveness of expanding learning time and the challenges to doing so?

## Data Sources and Analysis

This study used data from two sources: an online school improvement planning tool called *Indistar* and a series of interviews at the state, district, and school levels.

### *Indistar*

To monitor and support SIG activities, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) used *Indistar*, an online school improvement-planning tool. *Indistar* asked school teams to report on each of the 11 required SIG transformation activities, including expanding learning time, using multiple indicators (Table 1).

**Table 1. Activities of the SIG Transformation Model and Specified Indistar Indicators**

<b>SIG Activity</b>	<b>Indistar Indicator</b>
<b>Provide operational flexibility</b>	A03: LEA* has established performance objectives for each transformation school
	A06: LEA negotiates union waivers if needed
<b>Use ongoing, intensive technical assistance</b>	B04: LEA has designed an internal lead partner for each transformation school
	B12: LEA has a plan for evaluation and has clarified who is accountable for collecting data
	B14: LEA has appointed a school transformation team
	B15: LEA provides the school transformation team members with information on what the school can do to promote rapid improvement
<b>Replace the principal and provide administrative leadership development</b>	C05: LEA has an established criteria and format for interviewing candidates
	C06: LEA selects and hires qualified principals with the necessary competencies to be change leaders
	C08: Principal effectively and clearly communicates the message of change
	C13: Principal focuses on building leadership capacity, achieving learning goals, and improving instruction
<b>Create a teacher and principal evaluation system and remove ineffective staff</b>	D01: Principal regularly evaluates a range of teacher skills and knowledge, using a variety of valid and reliable tools
	D02: Principal includes evaluation of student outcomes in teacher evaluation
	D04: LEA/principal provides training to those conducting teacher evaluations to ensure that they are conducted with fidelity to standardized procedures
	D06: Principal provides timely, clear, constructive feedback to teachers
	D07: Evaluation process is linked with the LEA's collective and individual professional development programs
<b>Identify and reward staff for positive performance</b>	E05: LEA/school has developed a system of providing performance-based incentives for staff using valid data on whether performance indicators have been met
	E07: LEA/school has created several exit points for employees (e.g., voluntary departure of those unwilling, unable to meet new goals, address identified problems)
	E08: LEA/school has established and communicated clear goals and measures for employees' performance that reflect the established evaluation system and provide targeted training or assistance for an employee receiving an unsatisfactory evaluation or warning.
<b>Provide ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development</b>	F01: LEA/school provides professional development that is appropriate for individual teachers with different experience and expertise
	F02: LEA/school offers an induction program to support new teachers in their first years of teaching
	F03: LEA/school aligns professional development with identified needs based on staff evaluation and student performance
	F04: LEA/school provides all staff high-quality, ongoing, job-embedded, and differentiated professional development
	F12: Principal aligns professional development with classroom observations and teacher evaluation criteria
<b>Provide financial incentives for staff, career opportunities, and flexible working conditions</b>	G02: LEA/school has a plan and process in place to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers to support the transformation
	G03: LEA/school has established a system of procedures and protocols for recruiting, evaluating, rewarding, and replacing staff
<b>Plan and implement instructional reforms</b>	H01: Principal ensures that teachers align instruction with standards and benchmarks
	H02: All teachers assess student learning frequently using standards-based classroom assessments
	H03: All teachers, working in teams, prepare standards-aligned lessons

<b>SIG Activity</b>	<b>Indistar Indicator</b>
<b>Use student data to guide reforms</b>	I01: School has established a team structure among teachers with specific duties and time for instructional planning
	I02: All teachers monitor and assess student mastery of standards-based objectives in order to make appropriate curriculum adjustments
	I03: All teachers, working in teams, differentiate and align learning activities with state standards
	I04: All teachers provide sound instruction in a variety of modes: teacher-directed whole class; teacher-directed small group; student-directed small group; independent work; computer based; homework
<b>Expand learning time for students</b>	J04: LEA/school has allocated funds to support extended learning time, including innovative partnerships
	J08: LEA/school monitors progress of the extended learning time programs and strategies being implemented, and uses data to inform modifications
<b>Create ongoing family and community engagement</b>	K01: All teachers demonstrate sound homework practices and communication with parents
	K04: LEA/school has engaged parents and community in the transformation process

\*LEA is the Local Education Agency (i.e., the district)  
Source: Oregon Department of Education documents

For each indicator, the school leadership team rated the school’s implementation at “full implementation,” “limited implementation,” or “no implementation” in an initial assessment. Then, school teams updated this information when they moved to “full implementation.” Data for this study are from July 2012 and September 2013. To examine the initial implementation of the 11 SIG activities in 2012, we calculated the percentage of schools at each level of implementation for the *Indistar* indicators within each of the 11 SIG activities. For fall 2013, we calculated an updated percentage of schools that had fully implemented each activity by adding the schools that reported completing implementation by September 2013 to the initial 2012 reports of full implementation.

### Interviews

All interviews were conducted in spring 2014. We created the semistructured interview protocol based on federal SIG policies and the research questions of this study and the broader CEP study.

We began with the state-level interview in order to understand the state context. Three state officials, whose responsibilities included policies related to expanded learning time, participated in initial interviews by phone. We analyzed the resulting data using content analysis to identify themes within and across interviews (Mayring, 2000). State participants also provided “member checks” on drafts of the CEP study, in order to ensure that we represented state-level information accurately.

We conducted the district- and school-level interviews next. We limited the selection of schools to those schools that were still actively implementing SIG. We then selected schools representing the state’s rural, town, and urban areas. Finally, we selected schools to ensure that both elementary and secondary levels were represented. We developed an interview protocol based on both the requirements of expanded learning time in SIG and on anticipated challenges reflected in the research literature. As in the state interviews, we analyzed the data using content analysis

to identify themes within and across schools (Mayring, 2000). A district or school official also provided a “member check” on draft study materials to ensure that information was correct.

## **Results**

Combining data from the two studies resulted in a number of interrelated findings. State-level interviews provided information about the state context for expanded learning time (research question 1). The document review gave an overview of the extent to which SIG schools implemented expanded learning time relative to other required SIG activities (research question 2). Finally, interviews with officials from the three selected SIG schools described these officials’ perceptions of expanded learning time (research question 3).

### **Oregon State Context**

ODE’s primary policies and practices for expanding learning time are concentrated in schools implementing SIG. For these grants, ODE receives funding from the federal government and passes on 95 percent of the funding to schools through a competitive grant process. The remaining 5 percent of funds support the state’s assistance to schools and monitoring the grants. As required federally, ODE identified schools eligible for SIG as those among the lowest achieving in the state, based on state test scores; improvements in those scores; and 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.

ODE 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. All of these schools chose the transformation school improvement model which required expanded learning time. The three schools that participated in interviews for our study all received SIG funding in the second cohort. All three schools used some of their grant funds to expand learning time.

Funds for cohort 1 and 2 schools were substantial. 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 expanding learning time. In addition to expanding learning time, the transformation model chosen by all 17 schools requires 11 specific activities, ranging from creating a staff evaluation system tied to student achievement to providing ongoing professional development for teachers (see Table 1). State officials said that, therefore, funding for expanding learning time typically amounted to a small part of a school’s overall grant.

State officials explained that expanded learning time in Oregon schools focuses both on increasing the length of the school day and on 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 from NCTL for appraising the allocation of school time. 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 SIG schools. Schools also were able to contact staff at NCTL if they had questions about how to use the tools.

All three state officials said expanding learning time in low-performing, high-poverty schools was important to school improvement.

*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 school, there are a couple of things that you have to do in order to turn around a school, and expanded learning time would be one of them. (Oregon state official)*

*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. (Oregon state official)*

However, state officials did not see expanded learning time as a stand-alone solution for improving all schools. Instead, the interview data indicate that in Oregon expanded learning time is one of several key initiatives used to turn around low-performing schools. Other important initiatives include strategies such as providing high-quality instruction and a clearly articulated intervention system for struggling students.

#### **Fewer Oregon SIG Schools Fully Implemented Expanded Learning Time**

- ✓ Despite state officials' convictions that expanded learning time would help schools, schools found it difficult to implement this strategy. Analysis of school improvement plans showed that expanded learning time was one of the SIG activities that the lowest percentage of schools reported as fully implemented in fall 2013. At this time, SIG was still being implemented, so implementation would not be expected to be 100 percent. Therefore, this analysis doesn't show final implementation but rather midpoint implementation.
- ✓ On average, across the two indicators for this activity, only 50 percent of schools showed full implementation in fall 2013 (Table 2). This placed expanded learning time among the three least-implemented SIG activities. However, results also indicate a 23 point increase in the percentages of schools reporting full implementation from 2012 to 2013. Schools did report they were making progress, but implementing expanded learning time was likely challenging.

**Table 2. Percentages of Schools Implementing the Key Indicators Related to SIG**

SIG Activity	Fall 2012 Implementation			Fall 2013 Implementation
	Percent of Key Indicators: Full Implementation	Percent of Key Indicators: Limited Implementation	Percent of Key Indicators: No Implementation	Percent of Key Indicators: Full Implementation
Technical Assistance (2 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	91%	9%	0%	96%
Professional Development (5 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	69%	29%	1%	91%
Flexibility (2 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	71%	21%	9%	87%
Incentives for Staff (2 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	62%	38%	0%	85%
Staff Rewards (3 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	61%	35%	4%	84%
Principal Replacement (4 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	78%	22%	0%	82%
Teacher and Principal Evaluation (5 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	42%	53%	5%	74%
Student Data Use (4 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	24%	77%	0%	53%
Expanded Learning Time (2 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	27%	71%	3%	50%
Family and Community Engagement (2 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	29%	65%	6%	50%
Instructional Reforms (3 <i>Indistar</i> indicators)	18%	82%	0%	47%

Source: *Indistar* data analyzed by Education Northwest.

Note: The activities are rank-ordered by degree of implementation in fall 2013.

Note: The percentages in some rows do not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

### School-Level Interviews: Expanded Learning Time Alone Was Not the Answer

Interviews with district and school officials showed that all three schools (i.e., an elementary school in a town locale, a rural alternative high school, and an urban high school) had implemented expanded learning time to some degree and all had successes to show. The rural alternative high school had the strongest success, doubling graduation rates and showing test gains of more than 20 percentage points in reading and 9 percentage points in math during the period that the school implemented expanded learning time. The elementary school had a district-level analysis that showed improvement on state tests for students participating in afterschool programs. While the urban high school had less evidence of whole-school improvement, officials believed individual students participating in expanded learning time had benefited.

Despite these perceived benefits of expanded learning time, officials in all schools also reported that expanded learning time was not a guarantee of successful school improvement. This result echoed state officials' interviews. District and school interviewees said that the expanded learning time had to be high quality and that time during the rest of the day also had to be effective.

**Table 3. Sample Quotations About Expanded Learning Time as a Single Solution**

School	Example Quotation
School 1 (alternative high school, rural area)	<i>"I can't say that extended learning time is the only variable that we worked on to get those [positive] results, but it's obviously an integral piece, and probably the most integral piece of our results."</i>
School 2 (regular high school, urban area)	<i>"I think [expanded learning time] 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 [expanded learning time] is just one of those systems of supports."</i>
School 3 (elementary school, town area)	<i>"I think my advice [to others implementing expanded learning time] is to really be thoughtful when you're starting out and have a clear picture of what the outcome is going to be and to create the systems [beforehand] for the monitoring of the data. The extra time really needs to be targeted and responsive. Creating that space requires thoughtful planning and reflection, frontloading but being flexible."</i>

Source: Analysis of district- and school-level interviews.

Based on these schools' experience, it appears that expanded learning time needs to be coordinated with other initiatives. Investing only in expanded learning time would not be a priority for these schools according to interview data.

#### School-Level Interviews: Funding for Sustainability May Be Challenging

Despite receiving grant support, funding for sustainability in all three schools presented a challenge as the end of the grant approached. All three principals said that finding sufficient funding after the SIG grant ends presented a major challenge to sustaining expanded learning time initiatives in their schools, since SIG monies were the main source of funding. Table 4 provides some district and school officials' descriptions of these challenges.

**Table 4. Sample Quotations About Challenges to Sustaining Expanded Learning Time**

School	Example Quotation
School 1 (alternative high school, rural area)	<i>"We've been using SIG dollars for [expanding learning time], so that will be a challenge next year [when funding goes away]. I definitely think funding will be a challenge . . . I have teachers that volunteer a lot of their time, but I can't explicitly ask them to teach beyond their contract hours, so it's been nice to have some funding for that extra time. But when that funding leaves, I think that will impact our program."</i>
School 2 (regular high school, urban area)	<i>"We could do a lot more with a lot more staff. I could have somebody tracking whether or not extended learning time really made a difference. I could also have somebody in charge of managing student supports and going through student data on a daily basis. The school budgets have been an issue for so long that generally all support staff have been cut back in order to preserve teaching staff. So you have fewer people to manage this complicated work and to manage the systems, to tease through the data, to make sure that kids are connected with the right kinds of things."</i>
School 3 (elementary school, town area)	<i>"Grants are finicky, and they come and go. So, we're trying to diversify the funding streams. [The Sustainability Team has] kind of morphed into the advisory board, and so that's something we talk about—how with grants, there's constant change."</i>

Source: Analysis of district- and school-level interviews.

While all interviewees indicated their schools had sought funding from other sources, none believed they had a foolproof strategy for continuing expanded learning time. Other activities of the SIG—such as creating a teacher evaluation system, replacing the principal, or implementing a new curriculum—may be easier to sustain since they represent one-time investments. One principal noted that she was reluctant to invest too much grant funding in expanded learning time, since the efforts were unlikely to be sustainable.

**School-Level Interviews: Union Contracts Needed Extra Attention**

Two of three case study schools found it difficult, but possible, to address contractual issues and gain staff buy-in. Several noted that once staff saw successes, these issues lessened.

**Table 5. Sample Quotations About Contractual Challenges to Expanded Learning Time**

School	Example Quotation
School 2 (regular high school, urban area)	<i>"I think the challenge for us is our teachers' contract because it limits how teachers can interact with kids. I'm not talking just about compensation. It's just that we're pretty tight on how teachers can interact with kids, when they can interact with kids, and because that's so tight, it's hard for us to do extended learning."</i>
School 3 (elementary school, town area)	At first some teachers were reluctant to add 30 minutes to their teaching day, but this challenge has since been resolved, the principal said. <i>"We've worked through how to collaboratively make the best use of this time and recognized how valuable the time is for providing our students with extra support and learning."</i>

Source: Analysis of district- and school-level interviews.

In the alternative high school, neither the district official nor the principal discussed challenges with teachers' unions. It may be that these challenges simply didn't come to mind during the interview. It may also be that in the alternative school, teachers' contracts either needed fewer changes or were more flexible, since this was not a traditional district school.

**School-Level Interviews: Transportation Was an Initial Barrier**

Most Oregon schools rely on district buses to carry students to and from school each day. In two of three schools, transportation was a barrier that had to be addressed in order to expand learning time beyond the regularly scheduled day. Bus routes and schedules were initially difficult to change in these two schools, but both were able to resolve this challenge over time. It is important to note that these transportation changes impacted other schools in the district, as well as the school seeking to expand learning time.

**Table 6. Sample Quotations About Transportation Challenges to Expanded Learning Time**

School	Example Description or Quotation
School 1 (alternative high school, rural area)	The school expanded learning time by requiring students to earn college credit either by completing an internship or by enrolling in the nearby community college. Transportation for students to the college posed a bit of a challenge, but the district rearranged bus routes to accommodate students.
School 3 (elementary school, town area)	Because the school lets out 30 minutes later than the rest of the district's schools, the buses arrive at the school last, after running other routes in afternoon traffic. <i>"It's taken some reworking of bus routes to be able to accommodate for our dismissal time. It took some coordination and collaboration to work through the difficulties."</i>

Source: Analysis of district- and school-level interviews.

In the urban high school, neither the district official nor the principal discussed challenges with transportation. It may be that these challenges simply didn't come to mind during the interview. However, it is also likely that an urban school would have less difficulty with transportation because students can take public buses to and from school for a minimal cost.

### **Educational Importance**

In Oregon, a state with one of the shortest school years in the United States, state officials had a strong belief in the importance of expanding learning time both within the regular school day and outside the school day. Interviews and document reviews showed that many Oregon schools began to expand learning time through federal SIG initiatives. However, midway through the grant, expanded learning time was among the least fully implemented SIG activities, according to our review of school improvement plans.

In-depth interviews with district and school officials from three SIG schools provided examples of challenges to implementing expanded learning time. These examples may inform future efforts to implement expanded learning time. Officials from all schools reported challenges with gaining funding for sustainability. While some advocates argue that schools can expand learning time without incurring extra expenses, **our data show none of the schools in our interviews was likely to sustain expanded learning time without additional funding.** More time in school appears to cost more in the schools examined in our interviews. Planning for these costs, therefore, seems essential as schools, districts, and states work to increase learning time.

Two of our three study schools also experienced challenges related to union contracts and transportation. The schools, however, were able to overcome these challenges over time. As others seek to implement expanded learning time, proactive steps to address these challenges are needed. For both types of challenges, the district likely needs to take leadership. Teacher unions typically govern contractual issues throughout the district. Similarly, buses serve all schools in the district. It may be that because SIG focused on individual schools rather than whole districts, contracts and transportation were particularly challenging in some schools.

Ultimately, interviews at all levels—state, district, and school—showed that expanding learning time was only one of the strategies officials believed improved their schools. Placing expanded learning time within the context of a full menu of improvement strategies seems important. If students in low-performing schools are going to succeed, simply spending more time in that low-performing school is unlikely to help. Interviewees agreed that instruction in low-performing schools must improve and must be tailored to student needs.

All these findings suggest that future studies of expanded learning time should examine expanding learning time in the context of larger reforms within the school and should perhaps also examine the strategy's cost effectiveness. While researchers explore these issues, practitioners working to improve schools should implement expanded learning time carefully, paying close attention to the quality and coherence of all the reforms within the school and to the costs associated with expanded learning time.

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