

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-141](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In recent years, a key strategy for improving student outcomes has been to extend learning time by lengthening the school day or year. In 2010, Education made significant changes to its SIG program, funded at about \$506 million in fiscal year 2015, including requiring schools to extend learning time in certain instances. In 2012, Education began to invite waiver requests from states to use funds from its \$1.2 billion 21st Century program to conduct authorized activities during extended learning time. Little is known about how much time public K-12 students spend in school. An explanatory statement accompanying Public Law 113-235 required GAO to report on learning time.

In this report, GAO examines: (1) various Education programs that can be used to support extended learning time for K-12 students, and (2) learning time in public schools nationwide. In this report, GAO focuses on programs that require or may allow schools to lengthen the school day, week, or year.

GAO analyzed the most recent available SIG and 21st Century grant data, as well as Education data on learning time from a nationally representative sample of schools. GAO also reviewed applicable federal laws, regulations, and agency documents; and interviewed Education officials and stakeholders selected to obtain diverse perspectives of school districts, states, service providers, and teachers.

GAO makes no recommendations in this report. Education provided technical comments, which are incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-16-141](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

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K-12 EDUCATION

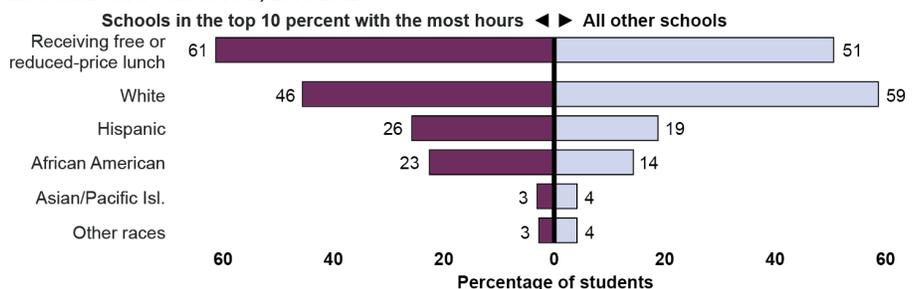
Federal Funding for and Characteristics of Public Schools with Extended Learning Time

What GAO Found

The Department of Education (Education) primarily supports extended learning time for K-12 public schools through the School Improvement Grants program (SIG). The SIG program, with an average 3-year grant of \$2.6 million, is the only Education program that provides funds specifically to establish extended learning time in schools, according to Education. Nearly 1,800 schools that received SIG funds (about 94 percent of SIG schools) were required to extend learning time under the SIG program for school years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015. In addition, under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st Century) grant program a small number of grantee schools—about 69 of the 10,000—have used program funds to support extended learning time. However, to do so, states need to obtain a waiver from Education to permit schools to use funds to conduct authorized program activities during an extended school day, week, or year. Education officials said that the average annual 21st Century grant was about \$113,000. Although Education supports extended learning time with the SIG and, in rare cases, the 21st Century program, Education officials also pointed out that most of its K-12 programs are designed to be used during the school day, regardless of the length of the day.

Regarding learning time, GAO estimates that the average length of the school day for K-12 public schools nationwide is just under 7 hours and the average school year is almost 180 days, according to GAO's analysis of Education's 2011-2012 data, the most recent available. In terms of hours per year, schools with the most time average almost 1,350 hours compared to about 1,200 hours, nationally. In addition, among all public schools, charter schools represent a larger proportion of schools with more time (about one-third of all charter schools) compared to approximately 9 percent of traditional public schools. Charter schools also represented a larger proportion of students who are low income, African American, or Hispanic. Regarding how schools use extended learning time, we found that schools with the most hours in a school year use it for different purposes. For example, GAO estimates that eighth-grade students in these schools spend, on average, one more hour per week on academic subjects such as English, math, and science, while third-graders spent more time in music, art, and physical education classes.

Estimated Percentage of Students by Poverty Status and Race/Ethnicity Attending K-12 Public Schools with Most Hours in a School Year, 2011-2012



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | [GAO-16-141](#)
 Note: Percentage estimates 95 percent confidence intervals of within +/- 3 percentage points.