



November 2015

K-12 EDUCATION

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

Accessible Version

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.

K-12 EDUCATION

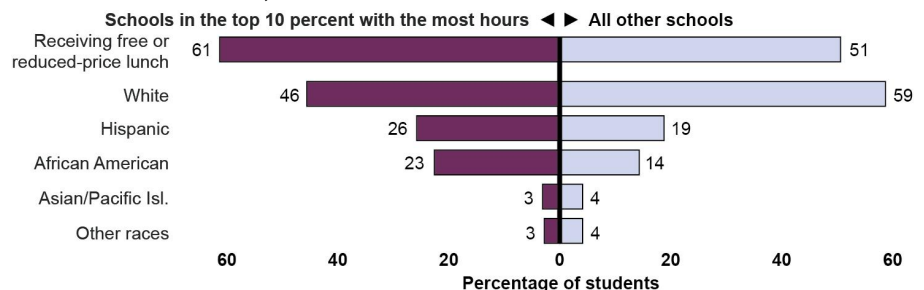
Federal Funding for and Characteristics of Public Schools with Extended Learning Time

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.

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Abbreviations

21st Century Education 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Department of Education
ESEA Elementary and Secondary Education Act
SASS School and Staffing Survey
SIG School Improvement Grant

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November 30, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on extending learning time as a key strategy for turning around the nation's low-performing schools. For example, in 2010, the Department of Education (Education) made significant changes to the requirements in its School Improvement Grants program (SIG program)—funded at about \$506 million in fiscal year 2015—which required certain school districts to extend students' learning time as a key strategy for improving the lowest-performing schools.¹ In addition to changes in the SIG program, Education in 2012 began to allow states to request waivers to permit the use of funds from its \$1.2 billion 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st Century) to

¹75 Fed. Reg. 66,363 (Oct. 28, 2010). SIG requirements refer to "increased learning time" and contain specific requirements that school districts must meet.

conduct authorized program activities during the school day, week, or year in schools that have implemented extended learning time.²

Extended learning time—sometimes referred to as increased learning time or expanded learning time—aims to improve student achievement in a variety of ways including lengthening the school day, week, or year, providing before- and after-school activities, and providing summer programs. All states require a minimum amount of instructional time in a school year, according to a 2015 Education Commission of the States study.³ However, the study found that states vary in how they define that time in terms of days and hours and the requirements school districts must meet.⁴ Further, school districts often vary in how much time they have in a school year beyond their state-mandated requirements. Consequently, it can be difficult to determine what constitutes an extended school day, week, or year. A statement accompanying the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 included a provision for us to review these issues.⁵

In this report, we examined what is known about 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.

To determine what is known about key Education programs that may be used to support extended learning time, we developed a working definition of extended learning time for purposes of this report. We focused on programs that allow or require school districts to use program funds to lengthen the school day, week, or year for all students in a

²Specifically, with respect to the 21st Century program, states may request a waiver of requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, that would allow grantees to conduct authorized activities during an extended school day, week, or year when normally such activities may be carried out only during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session such as before school, after school, or during the summer recess.

³Julie Rowland Woods. *Education Trends: Instructional Time Trends*, Education Commission of the States: (Denver, Colo: August 2015). GAO did not verify the accuracy of the legal content of this particular study.

⁴Recently, at least two states have conducted studies to examine whether their school day and year need to be extended.

⁵See 160 Cong. Rec. H9307, H9841 (daily ed. Dec. 11, 2014) (explanatory statement), accompanying Pub. L. No. 113-235, 128 Stat. 2130 (2014).

school. Activities that take place beyond the regular school day, such as after-school activities and programs or summer school programs, are outside the scope of this review. We also reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, guidance, and program-specific information, such as program performance reports. We analyzed SIG program data for school years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015. We assessed data reliability by reviewing existing information about the data system. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We also interviewed Education officials and other key stakeholders to clarify which federal program funds schools may be using for this purpose. The key stakeholders included officials from organizations that provide and/or are familiar with extended learning time as well as from organizations that represent state educational agencies, school districts, and teachers.⁶ We identified organizations based on a review of selected literature and discussions with Education officials.

To determine what is known about learning time in public schools nationwide, we analyzed national data from Education's Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for school year 2011-2012, the most recent year for which data were available. SASS contains data from a generalizable sample of K-12 public elementary and secondary schools nationwide.⁷ We used SASS data to estimate the distribution of instructional time by hours per day and days per year.⁸ To identify schools with the most learning time, we created a measure of the number of hours each school provides annually. This measure of annual school time was calculated by multiplying the number of hours of instruction that students receive per day by the number of days

⁶To obtain the perspectives of organizations that provide services or advocate for extended learning time, we interviewed representatives of the National Center on Time and Learning, ExpandEd Schools, and Citizen Schools. To obtain the perspectives of school districts, states and teachers, we interviewed representatives of the American Association of School Administrators, the Education Commission of the States, and the American Federation of Teachers.

⁷All estimates produced from our analysis of SASS data are subject to sampling errors. We express our confidence in the precision of our results as a 95 percent confidence interval. This is the interval that would contain the actual population value for 95 percent of the samples Education could have drawn.

⁸For the amount of instructional time by hours per day, we used a variable from the SASS Public School Questionnaire which asked school officials how long their school day is for students in both hours and minutes. If the length of day varied by grade level, respondents were to record the longest day. For the number of days in the school year, respondents were to record how many days are in the school year for students in their school.

the school operates during the school year. To describe the characteristics of schools with the most learning time, we analyzed schools with the most school hours annually, which we defined as the top 10 percent of schools, and compared them with the remaining 90 percent of schools. For this analysis we looked at selected school characteristics from the SASS dataset, including the length of the school day; number of days in the school year; school level and type (e.g., traditional public and charter schools); location (e.g., Census region and urban vs. rural locations); and student demographics, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. We assessed data reliability by reviewing existing information about the data system. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. For both research objectives, we reviewed selected reports on extended learning time, including how schools fund extended learning time initiatives and how schools use the additional time in the school day.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2015 to November 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

School Improvement Grants Program

The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program was created in 2002⁹ and funds reforms in the country's lowest-performing schools with the goal of improving student outcomes, such as their standardized test scores and graduation rates. Congress greatly increased SIG program funding, from \$125 million available in fiscal year 2007—the first year the program was funded—to \$3.5 billion in fiscal year 2009, although funding for the last

⁹Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 101, 115 Stat. 1425, 1442, codified at 20 U.S.C. § 6303(g) (2002).

two fiscal years has been \$506 million a year.¹⁰ Before awarding formula grants to states, Education reviews each state's application and approves the state's proposed process for competitively awarding SIG subgrants to eligible entities, including school districts. As a part of its application, each state is required to identify and prioritize eligible schools and ensure that school districts with the persistently lowest-achieving schools receive SIG funding. School districts must then apply to states to implement one of seven intervention models in each SIG school, each with specific requirements for reform interventions, during a grant period between 3 and 5 years.¹¹ Two of these intervention models, which are being implemented in the large majority of current SIG schools, require schools to extend learning time as part of the required whole-school reform strategies.¹²

SIG requirements define increased learning time as using a longer school day, week, or year to significantly increase the total number of school hours. This additional time is to be used for (1) instruction in academic subjects, including English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography; (2) instruction in other subjects and provision of enrichment activities that contribute to a well-rounded education, such as physical education, service learning, and experiential and work-based learning opportunities; and (3) teachers to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development within and across grades and subjects.¹³

¹⁰Of the \$3.5 billion, \$3 billion was provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 181. According to Education, this was a significant one-time investment that prompted the Department to issue new regulations for the SIG program that required the implementation of extended learning time for certain SIG-funded schools.

¹¹80 Fed. Reg. 7224, 7246 (Feb. 9, 2015).

¹²Education's 2010 SIG requirements originally defined four different intervention models, of which the turnaround and transformation models were the only ones that required school districts to "implement strategies that provide increased" learning time. 75 Fed. Reg. 66,363, 66,366-66,367 (Oct. 28, 2010). For purposes of this report, we are categorizing "increased learning time" as being included in our more general term "extended learning time" although we recognize that the regulatory definition of "increased learning time" includes specific requirements that do not apply in other program contexts. In 2015, Education issued new requirements that expanded the number of intervention models from four to seven, though none of these new models require extended learning time. 80 Fed. Reg. 7224 (Feb. 9, 2015). Schools will be able to implement these new models beginning in the 2015-2016 school year.

¹³80 Fed. Reg. 7224 (Feb. 9, 2015)

21st Century Program

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st Century) is meant to support local communities in establishing or expanding community learning centers that provide opportunities for academic enrichment during non-school hours, such as before- and after-school and summer school programs, and related services to students' families.¹⁴ The program provides formula grants to state educational agencies (SEA), which subsequently offer competitive subgrants to eligible entities, including school districts, community-based organizations, and other public or private entities.¹⁵ SEAs must provide an assurance in their applications for 21st Century grants that they will make awards only to eligible entities that propose to serve students who primarily attend schools eligible to operate a schoolwide program under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), which are schools with at least 40 percent of students from low-income families.¹⁶ In addition to activities designed to help students meet state and local academic achievement standards, program funds may be used to provide activities that complement and reinforce a student's regular school-day program, such as art and music education activities, recreational activities, telecommunications and technology education programs, expanded library hours, literacy programs, and drug and violence prevention activities.¹⁷

In fiscal year 2012, Education began to invite SEAs to waive specific ESEA provisions,¹⁸ which require community learning centers to carry out their activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session. The waiver allows grantees to use 21st Century program funds to conduct authorized activities during an extended school day, week, or year in schools that provide extended learning time for all students in the school. Education's guidance for the 21st Century program defines "expanded learning time" as "additional instruction or educational programs for all students beyond the state-mandated requirements for the minimum number of hours in a

¹⁴20 U.S.C. § 7171(a).

¹⁵A 21st Century program can be located in elementary or secondary schools or in any other location which is at least as available and accessible as the school.

¹⁶20 U.S.C. § 7173(a)(3)(A).

¹⁷20 U.S.C. § 7175(a).

¹⁸20 U.S.C. §§ 7171(b)(1)(A), 7174(b)(2)(A).

school day, days in a school week, or days or weeks in a school year.”¹⁹ According to Education guidance, these activities can include supplemental academic enrichment activities that support a well-rounded education for students and increase collaboration and planning time for teachers, or for partnering with outside organizations, such as nonprofit organizations, that have demonstrated experience in improving student achievement.

K-12 Public School Funding

The vast majority of funding for K-12 public schools nationwide comes from state and local sources. For example, in school year 2009-2010, U.S. public schools received about 87 percent of their funding from state and local sources—43 percent from state sources and 44 percent from local sources. Federal funding has generally comprised about 9 percent of public schools’ funding from school year 2002-2003 through 2008-2009. In school year 2009-2010, federal funding for public schools comprised about 13 percent, which was slightly higher than in previous years due in part to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.²⁰ For public schools nationally, Education’s Title I, Part A of ESEA, is among the programs providing the largest amounts of federal funding.²¹

Education Supports Extended Learning Time Primarily through the School Improvement Grants Program

¹⁹U.S. Department of Education. *Frequently Asked Questions and Answers on Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Under the ESEA Flexibility Optional Waiver* (Washington, D.C.: June 2013). For purposes of this report we are categorizing “expanded learning time” as being included in our more general term “extended learning time.”

²⁰Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115 2009

²¹GAO. *Indian Affairs: Bureau of Indian Education Needs to Improve Oversight of School Spending*, [GAO-15-121](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov.13, 2014)

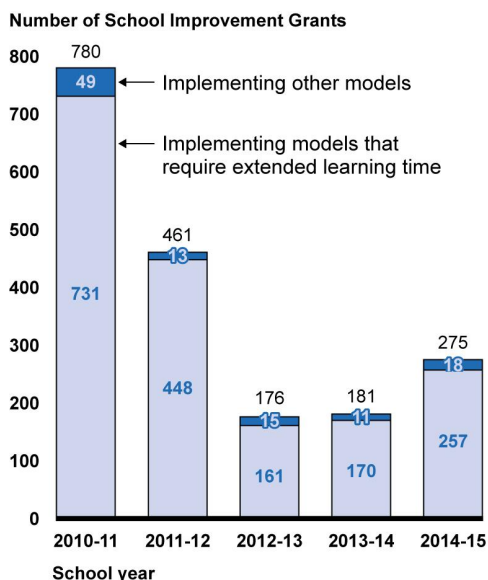
Education Promoted Extended Learning Time in K-12 Public Schools with Nearly 1,800 School Improvement Grants

The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program is the only program administered by Education that provides funds specifically to establish extended learning time in a school, according to Education officials. Between school year 2010-2011, when changes were made to SIG to require extended learning time in certain instances, and 2014-2015, the last year SIG data are available, nearly 1,800 schools or approximately 94 percent of SIG schools had chosen either of two school improvement models that require extended learning time, out of the four available models (see fig. 1). The schools implementing either of those two models had to extend learning time alongside other key reforms such as developing new teacher and principal evaluation systems.²² However, these 1,800 schools represent a small fraction of the nearly 90,000 K-12 public schools nationwide. Further, among the lowest-performing U.S. public schools, less than 7.5 percent are receiving SIG funds, according to a 2012 Institute of Education Sciences study.²³

²²Among other things, Education requires school districts to extend learning time in SIG schools if they are implementing SIG's transformation or turnaround models. Districts implementing other models are not required to extend learning time in their SIG schools, but are permitted to do so.

²³S. Hurlburt, S. B. Theriault, and K. C. Le Floch, *School Improvement Grants: Analyses of State Applications and Eligible and Awarded Schools*. NCEE 2012-4060. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education (Washington, D.C.: 2012).

Figure 1: K-12 Schools Extending Learning Time as a Condition of Receiving School Improvement Grant Funds, School Years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015



Source: GAO analysis of School Improvement Grant data. | GAO-16-141

Note: Between school years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015, schools receiving SIG funds selected one of four intervention models, each with specific requirements for reform interventions, in each SIG school during a 3 year grant period. Two of these intervention models, called transformation and turnaround, require schools to extend learning time as part of the required whole-school reform strategies.

Although only about 1,800 schools have received assistance through SIG grants, this assistance can be vital to a school in helping to implement key reforms such as extended learning time. According to an Education report on the 2012-2013 school year, the average 3-year grant was \$2.6 million as of that year. Education found that 68 percent of SIG schools in school year 2010-2011 (referred to as Cohort 1), 79 percent in school year 2011-2012 (referred to as Cohort 2), and 83 percent of SIG schools in school year 2012-2013 provided extended learning time.²⁴ This is to be expected given that, as previously noted, most school districts have chosen a SIG model that requires extended learning time. On average, Cohorts 1 and 2 had 76 and 96 more hours, respectively, than all public schools in school year 2011-2012, according to Education's analysis of SIG grant

²⁴U.S. Department of Education, School Improvement Grants National Summary, School Year 2012-2013. These numbers also represent SIG grantees that may have adopted other SIG intervention models that did not require them to implement extended learning time.

reports.²⁵ Additionally, a 2014 Institute of Education Sciences study found that 71 percent of SIG schools surveyed had extended learning time, while only 60 percent of non-grantee schools had taken steps to increase learning time.²⁶ However, Education officials also told us some schools increased learning time by very little, some by as little as 10 minutes a day.

Very Few Grantees Used 21st Century Grants to Support Extended Learning Time

In contrast to SIG, where most SIG schools are implementing extended learning time, as of July 2015, Education officials reported that only a fraction of the 21st Century learning centers it funds—about 69 out of 10,000 nationwide—are supplementing local extended learning time initiatives by taking advantage of waivers of ESEA requirements that allow them to provide 21st Century program activities and services during an extended school day.²⁷ Therefore, as required by statute, more than 99 percent of the centers continue to use these subgrants to serve students outside school hours, which according to Education officials is typically in after-school programs where attendance is voluntary. The average subgrant per center was about \$113,000 per school year. Regardless of whether subgrantees conduct activities during extended learning time or not, centers are to follow the same program rules about what types of activities can be funded. Further, Education said schools cannot use these funds to establish new programs to extend the school day. Rather, they can be used only to supplement other programs and activities for all students in schools that had extended the normal school day, week, or year.

Education reported in its fiscal year 2015 budget justification that using 21st Century funds in this way could improve 21st Century program performance by minimizing or eliminating participation problems that many schools and other providers have experienced. For example, Education reported that nearly half of students attending 21st Century

²⁵U.S. Department of Education, School Improvement Grants National Summary, School Year 2011-2012. This is the most recent report in which Education has provided this analysis.

²⁶Mariesa Hermann, Lisa Dragoset, and Susanne James-Burdumy. Are Low-Performing Schools Adopting Practices Promoted by School Improvement Grants? NCEE 2015-4001. National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education (October 2014: Washington, D.C.)

²⁷As previously described, states do this by requesting a waiver from selected requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA).

activities attended for fewer than 30 days in school year 2012-2013. Two extended learning time providers we interviewed said that changing from voluntary after-school activities to programs during the extended school day, which is generally mandatory for all students, helped reach underserved students who may not have chosen to attend if the activities were offered after school.

Since 2012, 27 states have applied for ESEA waivers to allow 21st Century grantees to conduct authorized activities during the school day to support extended learning time, and all were approved by Education.²⁸

However, as of July 2015, only 11 of those states have schools that have implemented extended learning time programs. With regard to states' limited use of these waivers, Education officials said that while the waivers have been available since mid-2012, extended learning time can be expensive to implement and it takes time for states to plan and collaborate with districts, schools, and community organizations. Additionally, Education officials said states are not required to report the number of eligible entities using this waiver flexibility, so these numbers may be low. Education is currently collecting data on conducting activities during the school day in schools with extended learning time for its 21st Century programs for the first time, and officials told us they plan to report detailed figures in February 2016 on the number of hours and locations of all 21st Century programs in schools with extended learning time.

Schools May Use Other Education Funding During Extended Learning Time

Education officials told us that most Education funding streams are designed for use during the school day—regardless of the length of the school day or year—and as such, schools may use these funds during extended learning time, consistent with other program requirements. For example, schools may use funds from Title I, Part A of ESEA to serve all students in schools that operate a schoolwide program in which they serve a high-concentration of students from low-income families.²⁹ Education officials said that these funds could be used to supplement local

²⁸As mentioned above, Education issued waivers to states of selected ESEA requirements. Without these waivers, 21st Century funds may only be used for activities during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session, such as before school, after-school, or during summer recess. With the ESEA waivers, eligible entities participating in the program may provide the same types of allowable services during an extended school day, week, or year.

²⁹Schools where more than 40 percent of students are from low-income families may operate schoolwide programs, enabling them to serve all children at the school with Title I funds.

funding to extend the school day for all students in those schools. Officials added that Charter School Grants may support eligible charter schools with or without extended learning time programs. Charter School Grants are primarily designed to assist in the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools, either through the creation of new charter schools or the replication or the expansion of existing high-quality charter schools with demonstrated records of success.³⁰ In another example, Education officials told us that Full-Service Community Schools grants, which support partnerships among schools, school districts, and community-based organizations for coordinated academic, social, and health services can be used to provide those services during extended learning time.

Representatives from several organizations we interviewed also identified ways that Education programs can contribute to extended learning time. For example, a representative from a teachers' union we interviewed told us the union worked with a school that used Title I funds to hire a site coordinator who helped the school manage implementation of a longer school day. Representatives from extended learning time organizations also told us that Title II funding, which is used for teacher development, was helpful for schools with extended learning time because it allowed them to use the longer day for more professional development. A representative from an organization representing school superintendents said school districts may be using Title VI funds, which provide assistance to rural schools, to extend learning time.

Education officials cautioned that schools that use federal funds during extended learning time must meet all applicable requirements for those funds, including requirements related to allowable costs and any statutory "supplement not supplant" requirement.³¹ In general, this requirement precludes a grantee from using federal funds for activities that it would conduct, in the absence of such federal funds, with state or local funds.

³⁰According to Education, the Charter Schools Program Grants for Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Charter Schools has been authorized under Education's appropriations acts since fiscal year 2010.

³¹Many federal education grant programs, such as Title I, Part A and the 21st Century program, require states and school districts to use federal funds to supplement, and not supplant the funds that would, in the absence of such federal funds, be made available from non-federal sources to carry out the particular program activities. See, for example, the Title I, Part A, requirement at 20 U.S.C. § 6321(b).

Schools with the Most Time in School Share Certain Characteristics and Use the Additional Time for Different Purposes

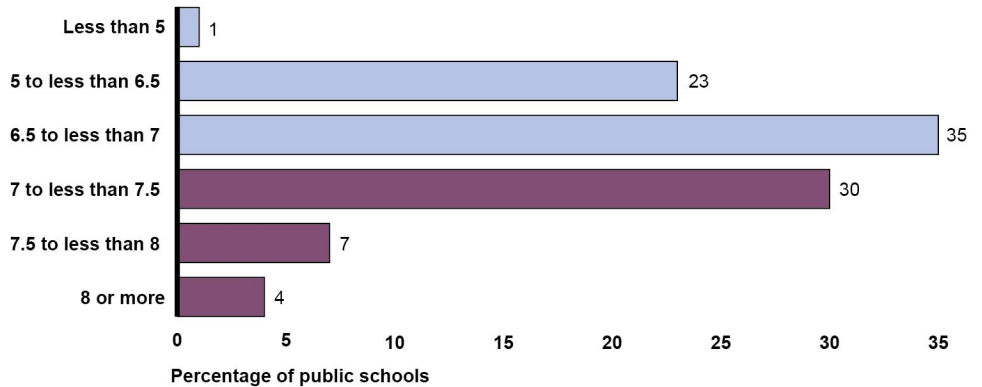
Average Length of K-12 Public School Day Was Just Under 7 Hours, and Those with the Most Time Add Hours to the Day, Not Days to the School Year

On average, we estimate that K-12 public schools nationwide have a 6.7-hour school day and a 179-day school year, according to our analysis of Education's School and Staffing Survey (SASS) data for the 2011-2012 school year, the most recent data available (see fig. 2).³² Specifically, an estimated 65 percent of schools have school days that are from 6.5 to 7.5 hours.

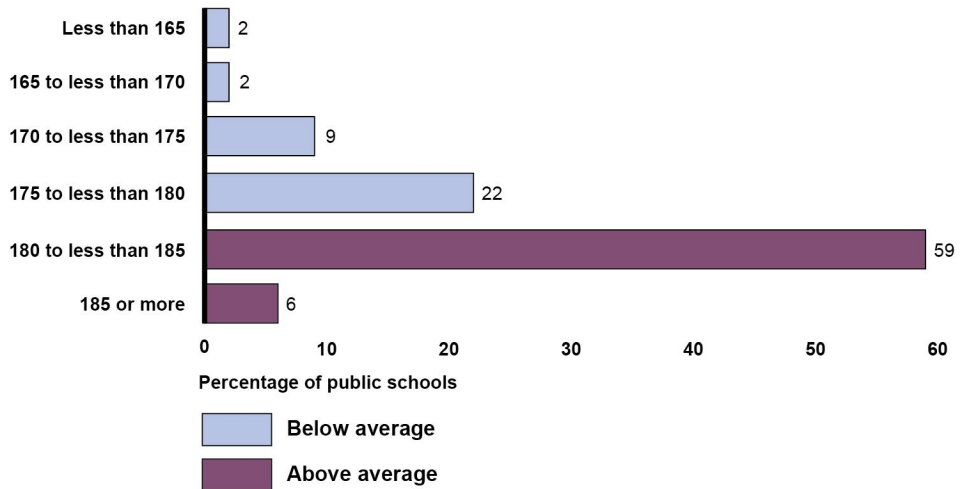
³²For the estimates of hours per day, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 6.7 to 6.8. For the estimates of days per year, the mean is 178.8 and the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 178.6 to 179.1.

Figure 2: Estimated Number of Hours in a School Day and Days in a School Year for All K-12 Public Schools Nationwide, by Percentage, School Year 2011-2012

Hours per school day



Days per school year



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

Note: Percentage estimates shown in this figure have a sampling error no greater than plus or minus 2 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence if the estimate is greater than 10 percent and a sampling error no greater than plus or minus 1 percentage point at the 95 percent level of confidence if the estimate is less than 10 percent.

Further, K-12 public schools that have the most time in school have an estimated average of 1,341 hours in a school year, which is about 137 more hours (or about four more weeks) than the estimated national

average of 1,204 hours, according to our analysis of Education's SASS data for the 2011-2012 school year.³³ The schools with the most time are going well beyond the hours required per year by most states. Specifically, a 2015 Education Commission of the States study found that most states require between 900 and 1,080 hours per year for all grades.³⁴

The 9,000 schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most school hours tend to add time by lengthening the school day more so than adding days to the school year. Specifically, according to our analysis of SASS data, schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time typically have a school day that is estimated to be one hour longer than all other schools. Further, representatives from the three extended learning time organizations we spoke with told us that most schools extended the day as opposed to adding days in the year. One representative told us that the typical schools they partner with have about three additional hours per day and operate Monday through Friday until 6 p.m.

Time Varies by School Type and School Location, but Little by Grade Level

Charter schools generally include more hours in a school year than traditional K-12 public schools (see fig. 3). Specifically, charter schools have an estimated average of 1,285 hours in a school year compared to an average of 1,209 hours for traditional public schools, according to our analysis of Education's SASS data for the 2011-2012 school year.³⁵ Further, a larger proportion of charter schools fall into the category of schools with the most time (30 percent)³⁶ as compared to 9 percent of traditional public schools. Specifically, of the estimated 2,754 charter schools nationwide, 867 are in the top 10 percent of schools with the most hours. As we have

³³For the estimate for average hours in a school year, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 1,329 to 1,353 for schools with the most time and 1,200 to 1,207 for the national average for all schools.

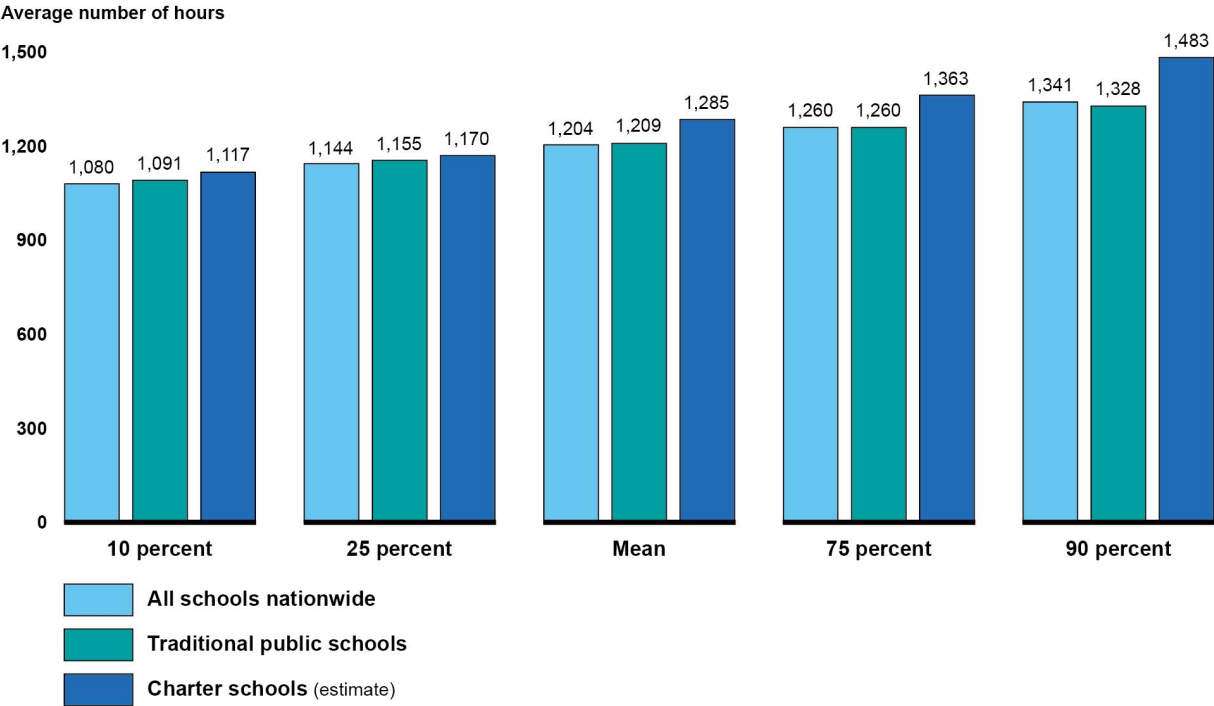
³⁴Julie Rowland Woods. *Education Trends: Instructional Time Trends*, Education Commission of the States: (Denver, Colo: August 2015).

³⁵For the estimate of average hours in a school year, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 1,261 to 1,309 for charter schools and 1,205 to 1,213 for traditional public schools.

³⁶For the estimate of number of charters nationwide, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 2,353 to 3,154. For the estimate of number of charters in the top 10 percent with schools with the most time, the associated 95 confidence interval is 689 to 1,045.

previously reported, charter schools typically operate with more autonomy than traditional public schools.³⁷ Consequently, charter schools may have fewer barriers than traditional public schools to extending their hours.

Figure 3: Estimated Average Hours in a School Year for All K-12 Public Schools Nationwide, by School Type from Least to Most Hours, 2011-2012



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

Note: Estimated average hours shown in this figure have a margin of error no larger than plus or minus 17 hours at the 95 percent level of confidence.

Similarly, the time that K-12 public schools spend on learning differs by region of the country and by school setting (e.g., urban or rural). Schools in the South have an estimated average of 1,253 learning hours per year, in the Northeast schools reported an estimated 1,197 hours, in the Midwest an estimated 1,192 hours, and the West an estimated 1,146

³⁷GAO, *Charter Schools: Education Could Do More to Assist Charter Schools with Applying for Discretionary Grants*, [GAO-11-89](#) (Washington, DC: Dec. 7, 2010).

hours.³⁸ The additional hours means that schools in the South provide, on average, approximately 3 weeks more learning time per year than schools in the West. The average number of school hours also differs according to a school's setting. An estimated 7 percent of suburban schools were in the top 10 percent of schools with the most learning time, compared to 10 to 12 percent of schools in urban, small town, and rural settings.³⁹

Conversely, there is little difference in annual school hours by grade level—such as elementary, middle or high school (see fig. 5). For example, for 90 percent of all public K-12 schools nationwide, middle schools have the most learning time, with an estimated 1,213 hours in a school year.⁴⁰ The difference is relatively small, however; middle schools have an estimated 38 more hours per year than elementary schools and an estimated 36 more hours than for high schools. For the 10 percent of schools with the most learning time, high schools have the most time, with an estimated 1,428 hours in a school year, but again, the difference is small. High schools have an estimated 17 hours more time than elementary schools and an estimated 10 hours more time than middle schools.⁴¹ One extended learning time provider we spoke with works to extend the learning day for low-income middle school students by providing academic support and project-based apprenticeships. Another extended learning time provider told us its extended learning time model is typically for kindergarten through eighth grades.

³⁸For the estimate of average hours in a school year by region of the country, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 1,246 to 1,259 for the South, 1,190 to 1,204 for the Northeast, 1,185 to 1,199 for the Midwest, and 1,136 to 1,156 for the West.

³⁹For the estimate of percent of schools by school setting, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 5 to 8 for suburban, 10 to 15 for small town, 10 to 13 for rural, and 10 to 13 for urban.

⁴⁰For the estimate of average hours in a school year by school level, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 1,187 to 1,197 for elementary school, 1,238 to 1,247 for middle school, and 1,196 to 1,214 for high schools.

⁴¹For the estimate of average hours in a school year by school level in the top 10 percent of schools, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 1,392 to 1,430 for elementary school, 1,407 to 1,428 for middle school, and 1,413 to 1,444 for high schools.

Figure 4: Estimated Average Hours in a School Year for All K-12 Public Schools Nationwide, by School Level, 2011-2012

Elementary schools



Middle schools



High schools



0 300 600 900 1,200 1,500
Number of hours

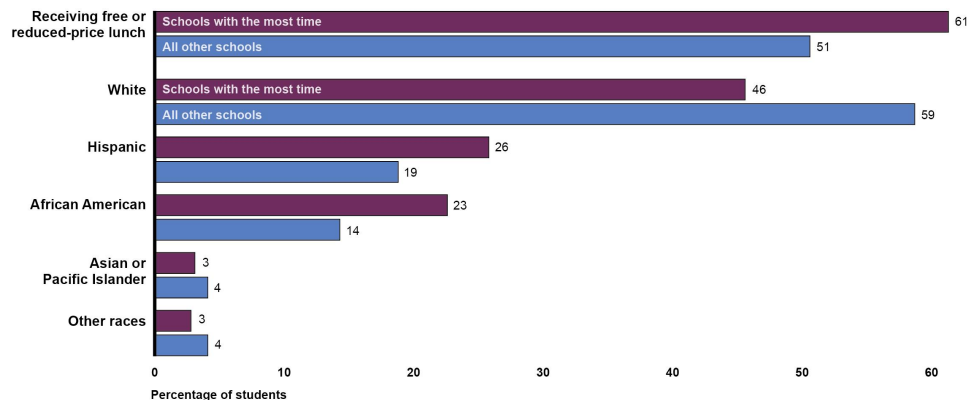
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

Note: Estimated average hours shown in this figure have a margin of error no larger than plus or minus 60 hours at the 95 percent level of confidence.

Schools with the Most Hours in a School Year Serve Larger Proportions of Low-Income and African American and Hispanic Students

Our analysis of SASS data for the 2011-2012 school year shows that K-12 public schools with the most time have a larger proportion of students receiving free or reduced price lunch—an estimated 61 percent—than all other schools whose student body population comprises 51 percent of these students (see fig. 6).⁴² Further, public K-12 schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time have a larger proportion of African American and Hispanic students—an estimated 9 percent more African-American students and 7 percent more Hispanic students—than all other schools.⁴³

Figure 5: 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 shown in this figure have a sampling error no greater than plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence if the estimate is greater than 10 percent and a sampling error no greater than plus or minus 1.5 percentage point at the 95 percent level of confidence if the estimate is less than 10 percent. The percentages for race/ethnicity do not add up to 100 because of rounding.

One explanation for this could be that, according to our analysis, charter schools serve higher percentages of low income, African American, and Hispanic students than traditional public schools. African Americans

⁴²For the estimate of percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 59 to 64 in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time and 50 to 52 in all other schools.

⁴³For the estimate of percentage of students by race/ethnicity in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time, the mean is 23 with an associated 95 percent confidence interval of 20 to 25 for African American and the mean is 26 with an associated 95 percent confidence interval of 23 to 29 for Hispanic. The mean for all other schools is 14 for African American with confidence interval is 14 to 15 and a mean of 19 for Hispanic with an associated confidence interval of 18 to 20.

account for approximately 27 percent and Hispanics for 28 percent of the charter school student body population nationwide compared to 13 and 21 percent in traditional public schools, respectively.⁴⁴ Further, among public schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most learning time, charters serve a higher percentage of African American and Hispanics students compared to traditional public schools. Specifically, African Americans account for approximately 37 percent of students in these schools and Hispanics account for 44 percent, compared with 19 and 25 percent in traditional public schools, respectively.⁴⁵

Further, one of Education's largest grant programs can be used to supplement local initiatives during extended school days or years and targets schools with a high concentration of low-income students. Specifically, Title I, Part A of ESEA provides funds to school districts and schools that serve high concentrations of low-income students. Further, representatives of extended learning time organizations we interviewed told us that the schools they work with tend to extend the school day to improve achievement for students who are low-income and minority who may not have access to the same enrichment activities as their more socioeconomically advantaged peers. One representative from an extended learning time organization told us that its programs seek to close gaps in opportunity and educational achievement for disadvantaged communities.

Schools with the Most Hours Spend More Time on Instruction

Public K-12 schools with the most hours in a school year use this additional time for different purposes, including more instruction in math and literacy, and more time for the arts and physical education. For example, during the 2011-2012 school year, eighth-grade students in schools with the most time (the top 10 percent) are estimated to have

⁴⁴For the estimate of percent of student body population at charter schools by race/ethnicity, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 23 to 33 for Hispanic students and 22 to 32 for African American students. For the estimate of percent of traditional public schools by race/ethnicity, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 20 to 22 for Hispanic students and 13 to 14 for African American students.

⁴⁵For the estimate of percent of student body at charter schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time by race/ethnicity, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 28 to 45 for African American and 36 to 52 for Hispanic. For the estimate of percent of student body population at traditional public schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time by race/ethnicity, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 16 to 21 for African American and 21 to 29 for Hispanic.

spent an additional 1.3 hours per week, on average, in English language arts, math, and science instruction compared to eighth-graders in all other schools.⁴⁶ Further, third-grade students in schools with the most time spent an estimated additional 48 minutes per week, on average, in music, art, and physical education classes than third-graders in all other schools, according to our analysis of SASS data.⁴⁷ Representatives from the three extended learning organizations we spoke with told us that their programs provide students more time for instruction in academic subjects and for enrichment activities, such as a debate club and project-based learning activities in science.

Teachers in the schools with the most time spend more time providing instruction to students as compared to all other schools. Specifically, teachers in schools with the most time (the top 10 percent) teach an estimated 1.3 more hours per week compared to all other schools, with a weekly total of 31.2 hours compared to 29.8 hours. On the other hand, there was no significant difference in the hours spent in a school year on professional development between schools with the most time and all other schools. Further, according to a representative from one extended learning time organization with whom we spoke, schools often partner with external participants or providers of after-school programs to provide academic instruction or enrichment activities during the school day.

Agency Comments

We are not making recommendations in this report. We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Education for comment. Education provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

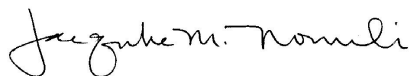
We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Education, and other interested parties. In

⁴⁶For the estimate of the minutes per week spent on core subjects for schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time, the mean is 21 and the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 20.5 to 21.6. For the estimate of the minutes per week spent on core subjects for all other schools, the mean is 19.7 and the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 19.5 to 19.9.

⁴⁷For the estimate of average hours per week teachers spend on instruction, the associated 95 percent confidence interval is 30.7 to 31.7 for schools in the top 10 percent of schools with the most time and 29.7 to 30 in all other schools.

addition, the report will be available at no charge on GAO's web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff should have any questions about this report, please contact me at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix I.



Jacqueline M. Nowicki
Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Jacqueline M. Nowicki, (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Elizabeth Sirois (Assistant Director), Sheranda Campbell (Analyst-in-Charge), and Lucas Alvarez made significant contributions to this report. Assistance, expertise, and guidance were provided by Susan Aschoff, James Rebbe, Kirsten Lauber, John Mingus, Carl Barden, and James Bennett.

Appendix II: Accessible Data

Data Tables

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

Poverty Status and Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of students in Schools in the top 10 percent with the most hours	Percentage of students in All other schools
Receiving free or reduced-price lunch	61.3	50.6
White	45.6	58.7
Hispanic	25.8	18.8
African American	22.6	14.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.1	4.1
Other races	2.8	4.1

Data Table for Figure 1: Schools Extending Learning Time in K-12 Schools as a Condition of Receiving School Improvement Grant Funds, School Years 2010-2011 through 2014-2015

School year	Implementing models that require extended learning time	Implementing other models	Total number of School Improvement Grants
2010-11	731	49	780
2011-12	448	13	461
2012-13	161	15	176
2013-14	170	11	181
2014-15	257	18	275

Source: GAO analysis of School Improvement Grant data. | GAO-16-141

Data Table for Figure 2: Estimated Number of Hours in a School Day and Days in a School Year for All K-12 Public Schools Nationwide, by Percentage, School Year 2011-2012

Hours per school day	Percentage of public schools
Less than 5	1
5 to less than 6.5	23
6.5 to less than 7	35
*7 to less than 7.5	30
*7.5 to less than 8	7
*8 or more	4

Days per school year	Percentage of public schools
Less than 165	2
165 to less than 170	2
170 to less than 175	9
175 to less than 180	22
*180 to less than 185	59
*185 or more	6

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

Data Table for Figure 3: Estimated Average Hours in a School Year for All K-12 Public Schools Nationwide, by School Type from Least to Most Hours, 2011-2012

	All schools nationwide	Traditional public schools	Charter schools (estimate)
10 percent	1080	1091	1117
25 percent	1144	1155	1170
Mean	1204	1209	1285
75 percent	1260	1260	1363
90 percent	1341	1328	1483

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

Data Table for Figure 4: Estimated Average Hours in a School Year for All K-12 Public Schools Nationwide, by School Level, 2011-2012

Category	Elementary schools	Middle schools	High schools
All schools nationwide	1191.5	1242.3	1204.8
Schools with the most time	1410.7	1417.7	1428.3
All other schools	1174.6	1213.4	1176.5

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

Data Table for Figure 5: Estimated Percentage of Students by Poverty Status and Race/Ethnicity Attending K-12 Public Schools with Most Hours in a School Year 2011-2012

Poverty Status and Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of students in Schools with the most time	Percentage of students in All other schools

Poverty Status and Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of students in Schools with the most time	Percentage of students in All other schools
Receiving free or reduced-price lunch	61.3	50.6
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African American	22.6	14.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.1	4.1
Other races	2.8	4.1

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey data, school year 2011-2012. | GAO-16-141

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