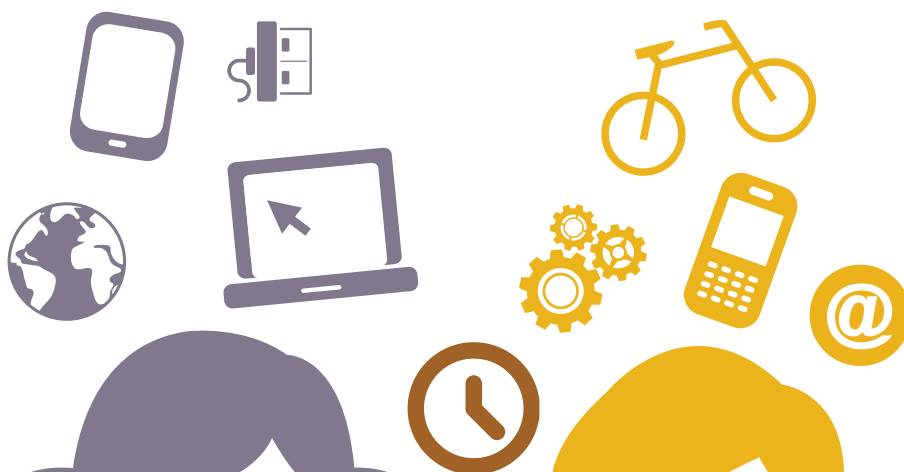


# PENNINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

EXPANDING THE DAY TO BOOST LEARNING



THE  
COLORADO  
EDUCATION  
INITIATIVE

January 2015



# "EVERY MINUTE IS AN OPPORTUNITY."

- ANONYMOUS

## INTRODUCTION

Each day educators, staff, students, families, and community members at Pennington Elementary School in Jeffco Public Schools face the exhausting realities of poverty. Eighty-six percent of their 246 preK through sixth-grade students receive free and reduced-price lunch, coming from homes where there often is not enough food to last the month. And many of these Wheat Ridge, Colo., students struggle with homelessness. Others live in single-parent homes or move frequently. Limited resources not only lead to a torrent of anxiety for Pennington's students and families, but also inevitably to a lack of opportunity.

In 2012, under the direction of Principal Sandy Craig, the community came together to brainstorm and design solutions to address these challenges. Their recommendation? Expand the school day. Increasing the time students spend in school could boost student achievement and growth; close the opportunity gap; and harness the energy, talents, and goodwill of the community to serve the needs of the whole child.

## WHY EXPAND LEARNING TIME?

“There are three primary reasons that we took this on,” says Craig. “One is that our kids’ achievement and growth scores were flat or declining no matter what interventions were being used. Secondly, we noticed an opportunity gap — many of our families struggled to provide enrichment activities such as music, drama, art, or after-school sports for our kiddos. Lastly, many of our kids go home to sporadic work schedules, unforeseen transportation issues, and lack of resources — all of which lead to unpredictable support with homework, inconsistent meal schedules, and added household and sibling responsibilities. We used those three things to determine that our community needed more from us, and we recognized that everything that had been proposed had been tried and didn’t work. We needed something new and different.”

Searching for that solution, and with the support of [The Colorado Education Initiative \(CEI\)](#), Pennington became a pilot school with the [National Center on Time & Learning’s \(NCTL\) TIME Collaborative](#) sponsored by the Ford Foundation. After site visits with NCTL, workshops, and meetings with facilitators, Pennington was tasked with redesigning the school day. School leaders responded by going straight to their stakeholders. “We went to our whole staff, our parent and family community, and our kids, and we started with the question: ‘What would be the perfect school day?’” says Craig.

Together, stakeholders shared ideas about current challenges — what they needed most and the constraints they faced. For example, the school day could not be any earlier since that wouldn’t work for families’ schedules. The stakeholders then divided their recommendations and needs into four categories:

- **Academics:** Personalize learning through interventions, extensions, tutoring, and uninterrupted core time for math and literacy.
- **Enrichment:** Close the opportunity gap by offering students a range of enrichments in leadership, sports, technology, academics, art and culture, and personal skills.
- **Scheduling:** Assess what an expanded day or school year might look like, and be strategic about professional development and staffing.

## THE TIME COLLABORATIVE

### *Creating More and Better Learning Time*

One of the most valuable resources in education is **time** and how it is used. Next generation learning environments intentionally use time to personalize learning, provide deeper interventions, and create opportunities for learning to expand beyond the classroom. Thanks to the Ford Foundation, CEI is supporting innovative approaches to learning environments that result in more and better learning time for students and educators known as the TIME Collaborative.

The TIME Collaborative is a partnership between the Ford Foundation and the NCTL to help five states, including Colorado, leverage additional learning time to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences essential for college and career success.

In Colorado, three districts and 12 schools, including Pennington, worked closely with NCTL, CEI, and the Colorado Department of Education to design a school day and year that was personalized to the unique needs of their students and community. The redesign process involved technical assistance and targeted coaching with each school and district team. Plans focused on integrating NCTL’s *Seven Essential Elements for More and Better Learning Time* with school and district priorities to provide eight hours per day of high quality learning time for students.

NCTL’s seven essential elements include:

- Focused schoolwide priorities
- Rigorous academics
- Differentiated supports
- Frequent data cycles
- Targeted teacher development
- Engaging enrichments
- Enhanced school culture

Colorado’s TIME Collaborative placed a priority on addressing populations of concentrated poverty and other underrepresented groups such as high minority populations, rural populations, and districts and schools eligible for federal Title I funding. The schools engaged in this work have among the highest minority and poverty concentrations within their districts.

- **Systems:** Identify the school’s mindset and culture. Make systemwide decisions about meals, snacks, and flexible groupings based on students’ competencies, behavioral requirements, and social needs.

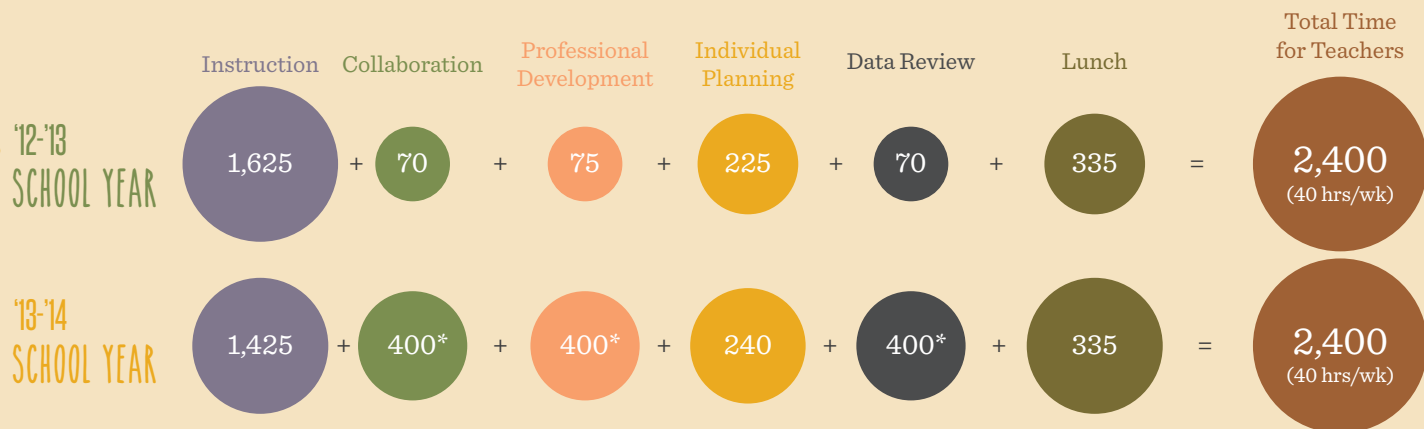
Using these four categories as guides, the stakeholders began to design options that met students’ needs, reflected parents’ and families’ requests, and stayed within the bounds of educators’ contracts. After multiple drafts and iterations, they created the Expanded Learning Time model, which was launched in 2013.

# THE MODEL: EXPAND THE SCHOOL DAY, BOOST STUDENT LEARNING

With the new Expanded Learning Time model, Pennington moved from a seven-hour school day to an eight-and-a-half-hour day. The chart below

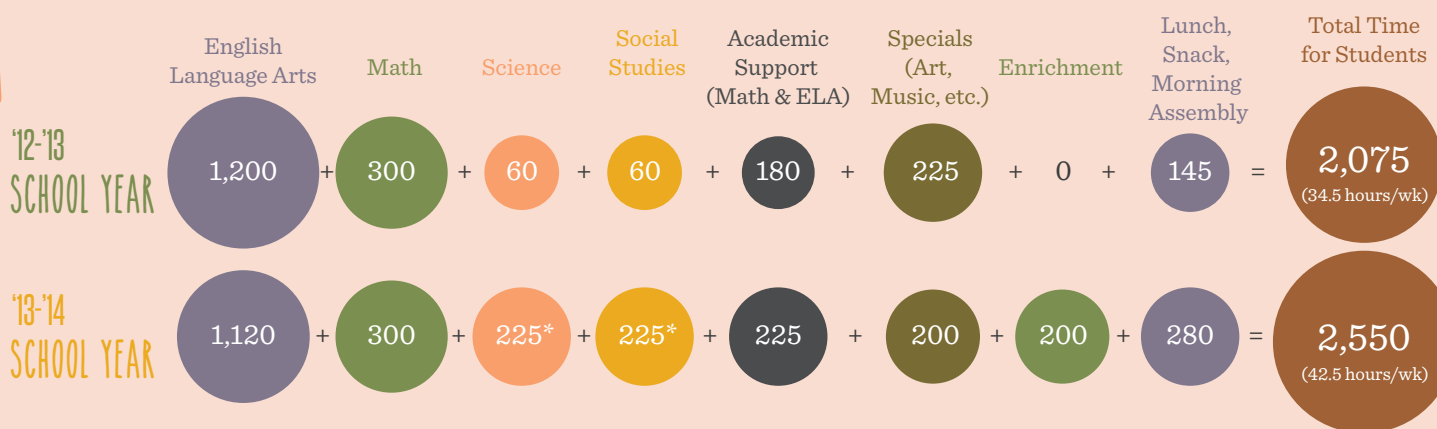
shows the schedule changes for both teachers and students:

## PENNINGTON TEACHER TIME (minutes per week)



\*Combined collaboration, professional development, and data review time.

## PENNINGTON STUDENT TIME (minutes per week)



\*Alternating science and social studies.



CREATING A FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Having a school that provides all the services a child needs to be successful is one of Pennington's main missions.

Research has proved expanding learning time boosts student achievement. [Read why here.](#)

Pennington staff, families, and stakeholders knew that adding more time didn't inevitably equal more and better learning, but it did provide the conditions for Pennington to work to meet three main goals:

## GOAL 1

### Increase student achievement and growth

- The extra time allows for uninterrupted core learning in reading, writing, and math for all students each day. Additionally, Pennington implemented a competency-based learning environment to flexibly group students based on mastery of competencies rather than age. Students can either be grouped in primary, mid-intermediate, or intermediate levels. All students receive 130 minutes of daily literacy instruction (reading/writing), which includes 45 minutes of interventions and extensions. Students also have 60 minutes of math instruction, which includes 30 minutes of interventions. Interventions and extensions are provided in small groups and personalized based on a student's individual needs. ([Watch this video](#) to learn more about Pennington's instructional strategy for flexible groupings.)
- The extra time also provides the space for professional learning and analysis of student data. Each day, Pennington educators meet for an hour and 20 minutes in professional learning communities to discuss student learning. Teachers also have 45 minutes of individual planning time. To allow for this, Pennington is creative with its staffing. Trained paraprofessionals, a mental health team, and licensed support staff — including a master teacher, literacy coach, and interventionists — oversee academic enrichments while educators collaborate and plan.

## GOAL 2

### Close the opportunity gap

- Every student receives daily academic extensions that rotate throughout the week. These extensions include math, vocabulary, technology/computer skills, and library, as well as positive behavioral supports that are personalized to meet individual needs.
- Every student also receives daily enrichments in technology, life skills, art and culture, recreation and fitness, and/or community service.

Intermediate students can choose these enrichments based on what excites them and any academic needs. Elementary students' schedules are designed by Pennington staff.

## GOAL 3

### Serve the needs of the whole child

- Community equals school. Rather than having Pennington be one system within the larger Wheat Ridge community, the stakeholders at Pennington strive to create a school that is a vibrant, welcoming space embedded within its community. (See [wrap-around services](#) for a list of resources and programs offered to students and their families.)



Cultivating a safe and healthy space for learning to occur is a priority for everyone on the Pennington team. If children don't feel safe, if they are coming to school hungry or after a stressful evening, learning is not possible, say Craig and Kym O'Donnell, Pennington's expanded learning time resource teacher.

## PENNINGTON'S ENRICHMENTS

Pennington staff and community partners offer a range of enrichments for students, including:

- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| • Track and field      | • Cultural kitchen   |
| • Karate               | • Sign language      |
| • Retro recycling      | • Yoga               |
| • Drama matters        | • Chess              |
| • Babysitting basics   | • Broadway dance     |
| • Computer choice      | • Student leadership |
| • Builders of tomorrow |                      |

[Click here](#) to see more enrichments.



# EXPANDED LEARNING TIME: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PENNINGTON STUDENTS

In her role as expanded learning time resource teacher, O'Donnell created day-in-the-life narratives to illustrate what a typical school day

looks like for Pennington students. Here's a look at the schedule for Ryan, an intermediate student:

7:50 am

**Start of the school day.** When Ryan arrives at school, he reports to the gym for his morning assembly where he is inspired to start his day as an active learner while staff take attendance and lunch count. During these assemblies, staff and students build community, covering topics such as anti-bullying and testing attitudes. The intermediate teachers have common planning time during this morning meeting.

8:10 am

**Warm-up with literacy.** Ryan's teacher takes him to his classroom for a short warm-up, whole-group literacy activity.

8:30 am

**Breakfast.** Many Pennington students come to school hungry. For Ryan and his classmates, starting the day with a healthy meal is imperative. All students are provided breakfast.

8:50 am

**Core literacy.** Focused on reading and writing.

10:45 am

**Literacy interventions and extensions.** Ryan and all other intermediate students are grouped according to strengths and areas of need in literacy. Up to 10 additional staff members support this block.

11:30 am

**Academic extensions.** Trained paraprofessionals, a mental health team, and licensed support staff — including a master teacher, literacy coach, and interventionists — provide academic extensions to Ryan and his class while his teachers meet in their professional learning communities.

12:20 pm

**Recess & lunch.**

1:00 pm

**Core math.** Ryan participates in core math instruction at his competency level.

1:30 pm

**Math interventions or extensions.** Ryan is grouped according to his strengths and needs for 30 more minutes of math interventions or extensions.

2:00 pm

**Snack time.** All students are given an afternoon snack provided by the school.

2:05 pm

**Science or social studies.** Depending on the day, this varies.

2:50 pm

**Academic specials block of art, music, or physical education.**

3:30 pm

**Enrichments.** Ryan gets to choose enrichments that quench his curiosity and passions. Before each six-week enrichment cycle, students are provided a written schedule of all the enrichments available, which they can review with their families and teachers and then rank their selections. Craig and O'Donnell then organize the enrichments based on these rankings.

4:20 pm

**End of the school day.**



## A LOOK INSIDE ENRICHMENTS

Sixth-grade student Yahairi shares how expanded learning time and enrichments have impacted her experience at school.

# PENNINGTON'S TAKE ON NEXT GENERATION LEARNING

Colorado's vision of next generation learning is aimed at helping students develop the academic, professional, entrepreneurial, personal, and civic competencies that a modern society and economy demand; supporting educators in creating learning environments designed to maximize these outcomes for students; and promoting systems that support and incentivize educators in this effort. Here's how Pennington is actualizing the five components of next generation learning:

## **Personal and Personalized**

At Pennington, student data is used to ensure students are learning and to provide them with the interventions or extensions they need in core academic subjects. Students get to choose their enrichment schedule, ensuring it's personalized to their passions.

## **Time, Talent, and Technology-enabled**

Pennington's model expanded the school day to make time for more and better learning. With the change, it was imperative that the school community also reimagine talent to determine how adults in the building would be organized to support student learning.

## **Competency-based**

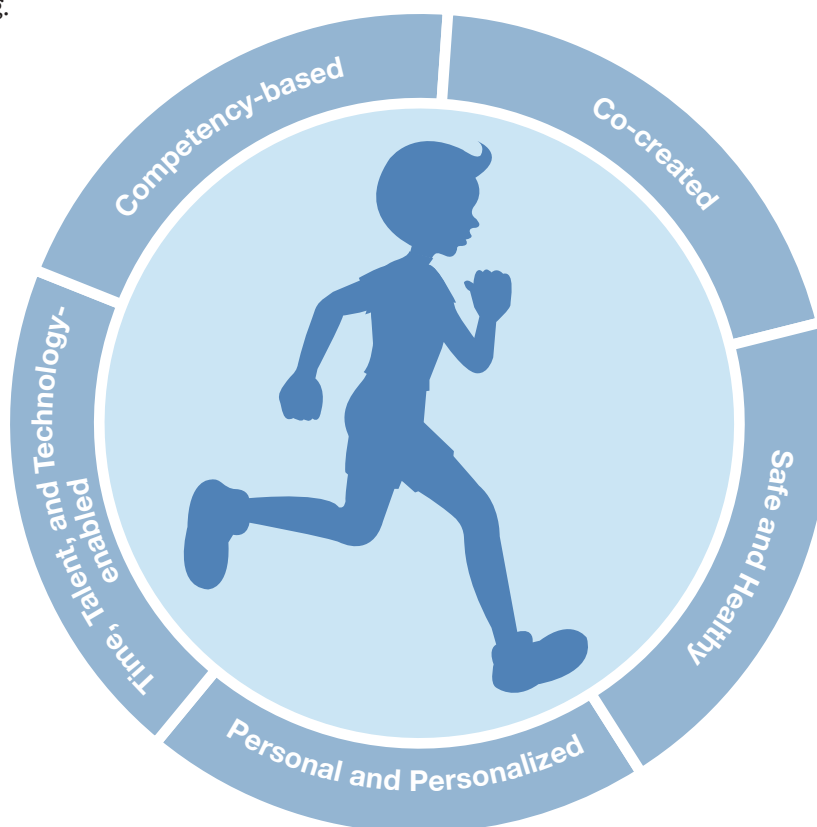
Pennington flexibly groups students based on mastery of districtwide competencies.

## **Safe and Healthy**

If students don't feel safe and their basic needs are not taken care of, learning can't happen, says Craig. Pennington's number one mission is to support the whole child by providing a safe and healthy learning environment.

## **Co-created**

Students, parents, community partners, educators, and staff built Pennington's Expanded Learning Time model together. Student, family, and community voices continue to help drive conversations; three times a year all stakeholders meet to discuss what's working and what needs to be improved in future iterations of the school's model.



# IMPLEMENTING EXPANDED LEARNING TIME

In designing a new model, Pennington made a number of decisions that helped enable its success. Craig, O'Donnell, and other staff members consider the following key choices to be the most important:

**Harness hope and grace to do what's best for kids.** Again and again, educators and leaders at Pennington shared how they have a culture of “giving each other grace.” This culture allows for failure and mistakes, all with an understanding that innovation and change are messy, and no one is perfect. The compassion for each other is rooted in each staff member's relentless pursuit to create the optimal environment and learning experiences for students. “We really have a culture where we do what's best for kids, period,” says Craig. This culture drives the Pennington team and encourages new approaches.

**Ensure adequate staffing.** A key strategic choice was hiring a full-time staff member to manage the new model's implementation and operations. O'Donnell, who serves that role at Pennington, has been instrumental to the model's success, says Craig. O'Donnell facilitates all community and family partnerships and volunteer programs, which include training and coaching partners about expectations and monitoring their impact; managing universal breakfast and snack logistics for students; coordinating all expanded learning time meetings in the building; and covering classes while teachers are collaborating or absent. “Committing a person to this role is essential,” says Craig. View O'Donnell's complete job responsibilities [here](#).

**Adopt a mindset of shared space.** At the start of enrichment programs, an unanticipated glitch popped up — some staff members were uncomfortable with outside partners using their classroom and materials for enrichments. Pennington's leadership team quickly provided solutions. First, the team emphasized that educators don't “own” their space; learning owns it, says Teacher Alida Carri. “When we took on the enrichment program...we had an email sent to us that said, ‘You don't own this space.’ It wasn't in a negative way, it was just prepping us to let us know, ‘What we're trying to do is a huge feat, and you're

## REIMAGINING TALENT

*To implement expanded learning time, Pennington had to rethink talent. The school added:*

### 1 Full-time Expanded Learning Time Resource Teacher



Pennington reallocated one full-time teacher salary to hire O'Donnell as the expanded learning time resource teacher. O'Donnell manages the day-to-day responsibilities, processes, and staffing for expanded learning time.

### 1 Full-time Social Worker



Pennington reallocated one full-time teacher to hire one full-time social worker who also helps students during academic extensions.

### 2 Paraprofessionals



Trained paraprofessionals work with students during teacher collaboration time. They also provide computer lab and library support, and serve as playground coaches at recess.

### 4 Resource Teachers



Pennington revised the job responsibilities of a computer lab teacher, teacher librarian, instructional coach, and resource teacher, allowing them to provide extensions for students during core learning time.

### 10 Outside Community Partners



Dance studios and museums are just two of the community organizations that run enrichments for Pennington students.

### 46 Adult Volunteers



Family members volunteer their time, helping to clean classrooms, organize enrichments, or work the snack programs. Other adults volunteer their time running enrichments.

### 8 YMCA Staff



The YMCA runs Pennington's primary enrichments and offers after-school child care for families who need it.

### 2 Boy Scout Leaders



The Boy Scout leaders help with enrichments.

Recent hires and volunteers go through a series of professional learning trainings with Pennington and district staff.



going to have to share your space.” Carri added that O’Donnell made sure every enrichment program had its own box of supplies, and all staff, community, and family partners were asked to sign a [shared/communal space agreement](#), excerpted in part below:

*“In order for innovation such as expanded learning time for students to be successful, there needs to be a general consensus that the learning spaces in a school are NOT specific to any one class and/or any one teacher, etc. The learning spaces are for ALL of our students and can and will be used to their fullest capacity to enrich learning opportunities. Every effort will be made to respect one another, our things, our property, our equipment, and our materials. If we all adopt the mindset that the learning spaces are for student learning and we as teachers/facilitators are only borrowing/using the space when it is our turn to be the teachers/facilitators, knowing full well, when we are not in that space some other teacher/facilitator is using the space to enrich/teach our students, then we can work together in our communal space successfully.”*

#### **Identify one primary community partner.**

Pennington already had a strong partnership with its local YMCA, which provided after-school care for students before expanded learning time was implemented. Once the Pennington team decided to expand the school day, the YMCA was one of the first stakeholders approached, say Craig and O’Donnell. “To any school trying to do this, you need one primary community partner that is completely on board with your mission and vision,” says O’Donnell. The YMCA, with a successful pitch to its funders, now provides the resources to run all of Pennington’s primary enrichments without any cost to the school or district. “They buy the materials and provide the staffing, and we train and supervise them,” says O’Donnell. Together, the YMCA’s coordinator and O’Donnell build the curriculum for these enrichments.

**Reallocate funds and raise money.** Pennington received a grant for the coaching and professional support of NCTL, but additional resources were needed for staffing and to buy materials and supplies for enrichments. Pennington decided to reallocate funds for staffing, making it possible to hire O’Donnell’s position and compensate the

paraprofessionals, community partners, and additional hires. To raise money for the enrichment supplies, Pennington crowdsourced — creating a gift donation opportunity in which parents, community members, and businesses could sponsor a student for \$30 per year, which would cover the student’s cost of participating in six to eight enrichment sessions. Staff members posted the fundraiser on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, garnering terrific results. During the 2013-2014 school year, Pennington raised \$6,000; after launching another fundraiser in 2014-2015, “We’re up to about \$1,500,” reports Craig (only a few months in).



Another huge driver of innovation at Pennington was the approach to design a model that reflected the voices of all stakeholders. Enthusiastic participation from students, parents, families, and community members meant everyone was, and continues to be, invested in the model’s success.

**Intentionally plan and build capacity.** Beyond allocating resources, Pennington staff spent a full year planning its model with the support of outside experts, and then building capacity within its staff and community partners to implement. Energy and investment were critical to the model’s current success.

**Consider sustainability.** “The greatest hurdle is coverage and sustainability,” says Craig. “In order for this to be sustainable, every single human body is nonexpendable.” O’Donnell agrees: “If someone is not here, there’s a ripple effect. It’s difficult to manage.” Both Craig and O’Donnell recommend having an on-call substitute who can cover any job or enrichment, which would give the school more

flexibility to provide coverage without any glitches. As it stands now, only teachers are given substitutes, which means if a paraprofessional or an enrichment facilitator is absent, Pennington needs to scramble to figure out who is available in-house to fill that role. At Pennington, Craig, O'Donnell, the school's social worker, and other support staff typically cover classes, interventions, or enrichments, but this shifting leads to gaps in other places and impacts student learning and staff schedules.

**Provide wrap-around services.** Pennington considers itself a full-service community school. This means it offers a rich array of resources and programs for students and families such as an in-house food, clothing, and hygiene bank; adult learning classes; and budget resources. [Click here to explore what is provided each year.](#)



Parent and family voices were instrumental in the design of Pennington's model. Hear how one parent thinks about the school's evolution and how her children have responded.

#### Additional Resources

- Pennington Elementary School Profile: <http://www.jeffcopublicschools.org/schools/demographics/elementary/pennington.pdf>
- *Teaching With Poverty in Mind*, a Pennington favorite, by Eric Jensen.

# EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

The Expanded Learning Time model provided the structure Pennington needed to improve student achievement and growth, close the opportunity gap, and meet the needs of the whole child, says Craig. Before the school implemented the new model, time was always at a premium. “But now we have enough time to flexibly group our kids,” she says.

“We have enough time to give solid core instruction. We have enough time to collaborate.” All of these changes have led to a boost in student learning, excitement, and school culture. Here are some of the most impressive metrics to date.



Enrichment program attendance is **98 percent**. During the 2013-2014 school year, third- through sixth-graders had **over 90 choices** for enrichment. **More than 50 scholarships** have been awarded to Pennington students to continue their enrichment exploration during the summer months.



Pennington received a PTA School of Excellence award for all its work with parent involvement and feedback from parent surveys. Pennington was **one of two schools** within Jeffco’s 154-school district to receive the award.



Attendance at family-teacher conferences went from **50 to 89 percent** in the 2013-2014 school year.



Out-of-school suspensions went down **80 percent**.



**67 percent** of third- and fourth-graders improved in language arts, and **70 percent** of third- and fourth-graders improved in math on Acuity, a computer-based exam that students take three times to measure how well they are progressing in alignment with the [Colorado Academic Standards](#).



Pennington’s State School Performance Framework increased by **18.8 percent**. The school performance framework is the most important grade given to schools in Colorado, says Craig. The framework’s grade accounts for academic achievement, academic longitudinal growth, academic growth gaps, and postsecondary and workforce readiness.

In its second year of implementation, the Expanded Learning Time model has already had a great deal of impact. Watch this video to learn more.



THANK YOU

TO ALL THE PENNINGTON STAFF, FAMILIES, COMMUNITY MEMBERS,  
AND STUDENTS WHO SHARED THEIR STORIES WITH US.

YOU'RE AN INSPIRATION FOR WHAT  
THE FUTURE OF LEARNING CAN HOLD.

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