Supporting Student Success in Connecticut

A Blueprint for Expanded Learning Opportunities

2013
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Dear Colleague:

We are excited to present “Supporting Student Success in Connecticut, a Blueprint for Expanded Learning Opportunities” for children in kindergarten through high school. This document is the result of more than a year’s work of a larger group of individuals, and we’re enthusiastic to share it with you in the form of this report.

In 2010, seven out of ten Connecticut children ages 6–12 had all available parents in the labor force. Yet because the school day does not match up with the work day, and because there are not enough programs to serve all those who need them, too many children are home alone or under-supervised while their parents are at work. Not only is this unsafe, it’s also unproductive.

We know that today’s young people in every part of Connecticut need to know more and be able to do more if they are to succeed in a highly-technical and international workforce. The hours after school and during the summer present a great opportunity to better prepare students academically, socially and civically. At the same time, expanded learning opportunities are proven to decrease the achievement gap that leaves too many Connecticut children and youth without the skills they need to be successful in the long run.

Expanded learning opportunities during the after school and summer hours keep young people safe, help working families, and help students succeed in school and in life. The benefits are clear and well-documented — now we need to get to work making it a reality for Connecticut’s children and youth.

The State Leadership Team for the Supporting Student Success initiative is grateful to all of the people who participated in this eighteen month process to examine the research, provide input, share personal stories, and develop these recommendations. It’s going to take the best thinking of all of us to bring this work to fruition, but given the passion and enthusiasm of young people, their families and the communities and schools we have seen, we’re sure that we’re on the right track.

Together we can ensure that all students can make the best use of after school and summer hours to complement and strengthen what they are learning in school, to build social skills they need to succeed, and to explore the wide world around them and find the spark that will make them ready to take on the world.

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Connecticut General Assembly

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Connecticut After School Network

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After-school must not be an after-thought
Parents need their children to be safe and supervised when they are at work. They want them to learn what they need to know to be successful as adults, yet they want them to enjoy their childhoods to the fullest and have fun too. They want well-rounded programs for their children that provide lots of room for flexibility and choice, yet help them learn everything they need to know . . . .

What do young people want? They want to be engaged, to have learning feel more like play than work. They want time to socialize and exercise, and more choice and control over their activities. They want to be successful in life, but don’t want to sit in the same chair all day, every day. They want to use the latest technology to create projects that have real meaning in the world, not just an exercise on a worksheet. They want to contribute and make a difference in the world.

Society needs its young people to learn how to learn, so that they may continue to seek knowledge well into the future. Society needs young people to grow up safe, healthy, educated, employable and connected to family and community.

These are tall orders, and “schools can’t do it alone” has been said and written so often that it has become cliché. Yet we stand at the crest of a wave of possible change in the way we’ve always thought about education. Connecticut’s schools and communities, nonprofits, parents and teachers need to be supported and listened to when it comes to making significant changes.

We need to have a larger discussion about when, where and how today’s students learn. This report focuses on one way of implementing innovation in this area: Expanded Learning Opportunities, or ELOs. More than just a new name for an old concept, ELOs are an important tool that uses this new way of learning. By linking school day, after school, weekends and summers in a way that is intentional and provides year-round opportunities for young people to continue to grow and learn, ELOs can also help meet important societal and family needs.
Your choices become their chances

HIGH-QUALITY EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES:

Build upon school-community learning partnerships where teachers and school leaders work closely with community-based professionals, sharing a common vision, goals, leadership and professional development opportunities.

Incorporate learning that is hands-on, engaging and helps children and youth gain the skills and knowledge they need for success in school and life.

Add time for learning and enrichment that complements the school day.

Incorporate youth voice, choice and inquiry.

Engage families to participate in their children’s lives and learning.

Utilize financial models that are affordable, scalable and sustainable.

Link to health, wellness, meals and other learning supports for eligible children and youth and their families.
Making a Difference for Student Success: Seven Smart, Strategic Investments Connecticut Should Make in 2013

The State Leadership Team identified seven strategies for integrating ELOs into the state education system. Below is a snapshot of the recommendations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Increase access to ELOs by increasing funding to the state After School Grant Program. Reinstate $1 million in funding to the After School Grant Program, returning it to its 2009 level of $5.5 million. Incrementally increase resources for ELOs as the economy improves, with the goal of creating new ELO opportunities for 20,000 additional students by 2017.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Position ELOs to address the issue of summer learning loss. Revise method and timing of awarding funds for state After School Grants to allow for use in June–August programs.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Incorporate ELOs into state education reform strategies. Encourage districts to partner with community-based organizations when providing ELOs in Alliance and Commissioner’s Network schools. Cross-train educators and ELO providers to work together in creating Student Success Plans. Provide training for ELO providers on Common Core State Standards.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Increase alignment between different systems and funding sources. Appoint the appropriate person from state departments with ELO-related responsibilities to the After School Advisory Council. Report on the proportion of federal child care quality funding that is spent on school-age providers. Allocate a specific percentage of federal child care quality set-aside funding for technical assistance and scholarships for school-age providers.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Use ELOs to rethink the relationship between time and learning. Create a personalized learning pilot for ten high schools to experiment with new ways to award high school credit for community-based ELO experiences. Hold a “Time And Learning Summit” in 2014 to share the experiences, processes and structures of the personalized learning and extended day/year pilot initiatives.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Strengthen the statewide system of quality and accountability. Reinstall the After School Quality Enhancement line item to support an independent backbone organization that collects data, develops infrastructure, coordinates quality improvement efforts and facilitates collaboration with various stakeholders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Continue to improve existing programs. Revise current ELO grant program guidelines to include changes to the grant award process, program planning and operation to help ELOs become even more successful.</td>
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- **Connecticut After School Network**

Seven Investments for 2013
What are Expanded Learning Opportunities — ELOs?

Throughout the course of the Supporting Student Success project the term “Expanded Learning Opportunities,” ELO in short, was used as a broad term to describe after-school, summer and out-of-school time programs for children and youth. Much confusion can sometimes arise with similar terms that are used interchangeably, including after-school program, summer camp, extended day, extended year, enrichment and out-of-school time. For the purposes of this report, expanded learning opportunities are considered any structured program for school-age children or youth that occurs primarily outside the regular school day in which participation is voluntary. ELOs provide safety, promote positive development, and offer additional academic assistance and enrichment to students. It is their voluntary nature that sets them apart from longer school-day or school-year initiatives that require the participation of all the students in a school.

**Timing/Hours of Operation**
Most ELOs take place after school, during the summer and school vacations, in the evenings, before school, and on weekends, but can also include innovative uses of time during traditional school day hours, especially for older youth, e.g. internships and supported work-study opportunities.

**Location**
ELOs can be either school-based or community-based. Even programs that are run entirely by school staff in a school building are considered ELOs if they are voluntary in nature. ELO programs based in one setting may also use other community resources, e.g. a swimming pool at a local YMCA, regardless of their regular location.

**Provider**
ELOs occur in a range of different settings, provided by a mix of different types of providers, including public & private schools, community-based organizations, YMCAs, YWCAs, Boy & Girls Clubs, town parks and recreation departments, child care centers, youth service bureaus, religious institutions, for-profit organizations, museums, scouts, libraries, colleges, family resource centers and youth sports organizations. The most effective programs have been shown to utilize strong collaborations between community partners and schools.

**Type of Programming**
Academic tutoring, arts, science, career, health, recreation, mental health groups, enrichment and sports are all common activities in ELOs. Any type of program that engages students’ interests is possible.

**Type of Staff**
The most effective and efficient program models employ a mix of staff with different strengths and areas of expertise. ELOs can be staffed by certified teachers, college students, volunteers, paraprofessionals, health care providers, social workers, librarians, youth workers, child care providers and community members with specialty knowledge to share.
The Supporting Student Success Initiative

**Project goals and structure**

Supporting Student Success (S3) is a policy-focused effort to bring together key state leaders to build a common understanding and a joint plan for expanding learning opportunities for youth outside the traditional school day.

The work has been supported by the Center for Best Practice at the National Governor’s Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Council of Chief State School Officers, with financial support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Additional support for the youth voice component was provided by the Perrin Family Foundation.

The S3 process brought together a State Leadership Team which undertook a year-long process of information-gathering and internal discussions about ways to expand learning opportunities for children and youth during the hours that they are not in school. Supported by the Connecticut After School Advisory Council, a larger group of stakeholders and experts in the field, this group identified several key components of a statewide plan to engage Connecticut’s young people in high-quality programs after school and in the summer. These key components include: building on successful initiatives that already exist; coordinating within and between state agencies; strengthening community-based partnerships to leverage additional resources; increasing accountability and quality for publicly funded programs; greater availability of technical assistance and resources; and supporting an independent backbone organization to continue facilitating statewide collaboration, infrastructure development and data collection.

Representatives from the various arms of state government participated in S3 with the goal of creating a consensus on the future of expanded learning through after-school and summer programming for Connecticut’s young people. The State Leadership Team has included:

Elizabeth Boukus  
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Tracey Lay  
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Alvin Wilson  
previously with the Office of the Governor

Both the State Leadership Team and the After School Advisory Council received technical assistance as part of the initiative from the Center for Best Practice at the National Governor’s Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, and Council of Chief State School Officers in the form of information and resources throughout the process. In addition, members of Connecticut’s state leadership team met with these funders and representatives from three other states that are undertaking the same initiative, and together travelled to Providence, Rhode Island and Portland, Oregon to tour model programs and hear from national experts on ELOs. This allowed the team to better understand what high-quality programs and larger state-level systems in this area looked like in practice. By seeing first-hand what is working in other places, the team was able to combine the best research with an understanding of the Connecticut context to create policy recommendations that are steeped in practical experience and national research.

**Process of collecting input from parents and youth**

The State Leadership Team also gathered data from those most affected by expanded learning opportunities or the lack thereof — youth and parents in Connecticut. Between October and December 2011, ten focus groups were held in partnership with community-based organizations across the state. These frank conversations brought youth voices to the policy table and provided qualitative data about what types of activities for children and youth are currently available, what barriers exist to participation, and what additional opportunities they would like to see in the future. In addition, paper and electronic surveys were conducted for parents, youth, and program providers. A total of 699 surveys were completed and included a geographically and demographically diverse representation.

**Major concerns identified**

Overall, one theme became clear: limited access to ELOs is the most significant barrier to participation. For most families this is because there are not enough programs available that are affordable and age-appropriate. To a significant but lesser degree, transportation to and from programs was also a barrier.

Throughout the year, the supply of programs does not meet the demand. For many rural communities, there are no programs available at all. In other areas of the state, those programs that are affordable and physically accessible have waiting lists. Working parents report significant stress trying to find programs for their children. Unfortunately the result is that too many children are home alone, or supervised only by older siblings. This becomes much harder during the summer months, when parents cobble together a patchwork of solutions to try to ensure their children are supervised.
Many community-based organizations and municipal parks and recreation departments help by caring for some children in their area, but funding limitations keep them from being able to serve more children. Other programs offer enrichment or recreation opportunities that do not meet the needs of working parents because of their schedule — they finish too early or don’t meet all five days or only meet for one or two weeks. Most summer programs do not extend for the entire summer, and during certain weeks at the beginning and end of the summer there are few if any options.

There are not enough programs, especially in the summer

Throughout the year, there is an even greater lack of programming for middle school students — “tweens” too old for child care yet too young to be home alone. This type of program is also the hardest type in which to maintain high levels of participation, as older children tend to “vote with their feet” and require a more varied and engaging mix of activities. More and different programming is also needed for high school students — some communities offer very little in the way of enrichment and recreational programs. Yet more personalized learning programs and projects chosen and created by the youth themselves with adult guidance can have tremendous success with teenagers as they explore their own particular interests, individually or in groups.

The cost of high-quality programs is a significant barrier

The average cost for 15 hours of after-school child care in Connecticut is $104 per child per week; care in a family day care home costs about $84 per week. Full-day summer programs (not overnight camps) range from $150 – $300 per week per child and frequently cost even more, although some programs do offer scholarships. It’s not surprising then that Connecticut parents cited affordability as one of the primary barriers to participation. According to an After School Alliance report, nationally parents pay an average of 76% of after-school program costs through tuition and fees. While some school districts and nonprofit programs receive grants to offset this cost to parents, this accounts for a very small fraction of the children and youth who need this programming.

Parents almost unanimously support increased state funding for ELO programs

Connecticut parent surveys showed almost unanimous support for increased public funding for expanded learning opportunities during the after-school and summer hours. This mirrors findings conducted by the national group the After School Alliance which finds that almost nine in ten voters think that after school is important, and three in four agree that after-school programs are an absolute necessity for their community.

Children and youth that participate in programs like them because they learn new things and get to interact with their peers

The youth surveys and focus groups provided interesting insight into their perspectives on expanded learning. The research showed that those who participate in ELO programs give them high ratings for being fun, educational and good places to make friends. When children and youth are not in programs, they report spending their time watching television, being on-line and doing their homework. They also report a significant amount of boredom and recognize the link between boredom and mischief. Middle and high school students were unlikely to participate in available programs if the focus was not in-line with their interests. The specific types of programs that students would like to see in the future included sports and recreation, performing arts, career exploration with internships, video production and technology applications, and real world science.
What About Expanding the School Day and Year?

Increasing the amount of time students have for learning is one of the top strategies schools use to improve academic performance. This is not a new idea — becoming more efficient in terms of scheduling has produced some impressive results in some schools, even within the standard six and a half hours per day, 180 days-per-year model.

In the current era of education reform, state and district policy makers are looking for ways to help turn around failing schools, and more time for learning has had a great deal of support recently. Some schools in Connecticut have been experimenting with this idea, and a new pilot program in three Connecticut districts was announced in December 2012, supported in part by the National Center for Time and Learning and the Ford Foundation’s “More and Better Learning Time” initiative.

Longer school days and longer school years, when they include an intentional focus on “better learning time,” are the same as many expanded learning opportunities, with the one major difference being that longer school days require mandatory participation by all students, and ELOs are voluntary.

Another difference seen in some examples is related to staffing. State law and union contracts require certified teachers in schools, and ELOs, while they frequently employ certified teachers, are not necessarily required to do so, making their cost per student lower.

The third significant difference is that schools are paid for by local, state, and federal tax dollars, while ELOs are most-often funded by a mix of parent fees, grant funding, and government support, including in-kind resources.

The issues of whether to make additional time for learning mandatory, what staff qualifications are needed during this time, and exactly how a program should be funded should be based on local needs and decided by school districts and local leaders in collaboration with community stakeholders.

It is entirely appropriate at a state policy level to require failing schools to implement improvement strategies, and more learning time should be part of this mix. These efforts can be effective where they involve significant community partnerships and have strong community support to enable ongoing sustainability. They are less successful when the process does not create buy-in from all of the stakeholders in a community, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, school staff, community organizations, and general public, all of whom are necessary if the program is to meet its goals and remain sustainable in the long-term.
Investing in the Future

Seven recommendations to get started
1 Increase Access to Expanded Learning Opportunities

Background
The state-funded After School Grant Program run by the State Department of Education provides high-quality ELOs in locations across the state. Evaluation results of the program show significant improvements in reading and math for participants, yet the success is limited by the amount of funding available. Demand for the program is extremely high, with only one in three proposals being funded. Started as a pilot program in 2004, this line item grew to $5.5 million, although is currently down to $4.275 million due to budget cuts and rescissions. The program currently reaches 61 sites in 27 communities, serving more than 5,000 children and youth, at average cost to the state of less than $1,000 per child, or about $10 per day. The programs offer expanded learning opportunities for at least 12 hours each week, for a minimum of 25 weeks per year, although many provide more than that.

Connecticut’s after School Grant Program model requires strong collaboration between school districts and community-based partners as a way to leverage additional resources. Preliminary findings from an evaluation by the University of Connecticut show significant academic gains by multi-year participants when compared to other students in the same districts. ELOs are an investment in Connecticut’s economic future. Employers want employees who come to work and stay focused. Studies show that working parents experience considerable stress when their children are out of school and unsupervised, which can lead to lower productivity and increased absenteeism. If an area has abundant, affordable, high-quality ELO programs available, it increases the attractiveness to new businesses and helps retain current employers.

Why This Recommendation Is Important
Research has demonstrated that participation in high-quality expanded learning opportunities can improve youth success on a variety of outcomes, including academic achievement, school attendance, student engagement, and social and emotional development.

ELOs support student success
Children’s brains don’t turn off just because the school bell rings. Their brains are like sponges, soaking up everything around them. ELOs give children and youth a chance to apply what they’ve learned in school through a wide variety of experiential activities. They provide homework help, tutoring and increase attendance at and engagement in school. Studies show that participants in quality ELO programs do better on standardized tests, complete their homework and get better grades.

ELOs keep children safe
School days between 3 and 6 pm are peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with risky behaviors. Law enforcement officials are convinced that quality after-school programs help prevent crime and keep children and youth out of trouble. They point to studies showing that programs: reduce drug use and addiction; decrease risky behaviors such as smoking and alcohol abuse; and reduce risky sexual behavior and pregnancy. Working parents can rest assured when their children are safe in supervised programs and can concentrate on their jobs.

ELOs are a wise public investment
Taxpayers want their money to go toward after-school and summer programs because they see good returns on this investment. Taxpayer dollars would be saved in the long run from reduced crime and welfare costs. Children would grow into thriving, educated adults who contribute to the community and the tax base. Because high-quality ELOs provide opportunities for physical exercise and nutritious snacks, they can also help fight obesity and promote healthy lifestyles that young people can carry with them for the rest of their lives, resulting in a savings in health care costs.

Actions Needed
Reinstate $1 million in funding to the After School Grant Program, returning it to its 2009 level of $5.5 million
The current recession has eroded the amount of funding available for this program by 22% over the past four years. By reinstating a million dollars to the line item, programs would be able to provide services for the entire school year, instead of having to close early due to insufficient funds.

Incrementally increase resources for ELOs as the economy improves, with the goal of creating new ELO opportunities for 20,000 additional students by 2017.
This recommendation aligns with Governor Malloy’s education reform principles: deliver more resources, targeted to districts with the greatest need — provided that they embrace key reforms that position our students for success. A strong foundation already exists in Connecticut. To build on the success of the After School Grant Program, we recommend expanding its capacity over the next four years to allow 20,000 additional young people to participate in expanded learning opportunities. Since the program holds a competition for these grants every two years to coincide with the state’s biennial budget cycle, this capacity increase could happen in two waves, with a $10 million increase in 2015, and a second increase in the state budget line item of $10 million in 2017.
Additional recommendations for this grant program are included in the recommendations that follow.
Background
The state-funded after-school grants can also be an excellent method of providing support for ELOs during the summer months. Research documents the many ways which ELOs can eliminate summer learning loss and reduce the achievement gap. Yet, although these programs can operate during the summer, they are effectively unable to do so because of the timing of the funding. Typically the grants have been offered after the state biennial budget has passed into law, with grants being awarded in the late summer or early fall. But because of the timing of the state fiscal year from July 1 to June 30, summer programs (and the planning needed to operate them) span two fiscal years.

Why This Recommendation Is Important
Grants are not awarded early enough to allow providers to plan and execute summer programs, and explicit legislative language is required to establish a method of funding summer programs. A method must be devised to allow for the awarding of grants in March or earlier, even if the funding for the program is not available for months. This issue is less of a cash-flow problem as it is an uncertainty issue — parents require security knowing that they have a place for their children to be cared for during the summer while they are at work. Summer programs often fill up quickly, and they cannot “take a chance” on a program if there’s a possibility that it could fall through, leaving them without child care. Similarly, schools and community-based partners that operate summer programs need time to plan, staff and advertise summer programs well before the end of the school year.

Summer school is funded through the Connecticut State Department of Education and eligibility for the program is determined earlier in the year to allow time to plan for the upcoming summer. These programs, regardless of if they start before July 1, are considered to be part of the following school year’s budget, and one possible approach would be to allow after-school grants to follow the same timing.

Actions Needed
Revise the method and timing of granting funds for state After School Grants to allow for use in June–August programs
This could take the form of “roll forward” legislative language that would allow programs to use funding for a September 1 to August 31 grant period, or to move up the grant award process to allow existing grantees to provide summer programming at the start of a grant renewal, like summer school.
In 2012, significant education reform initiatives were created by the state government and are currently being implemented. These include providing more resources targeted to districts with the greatest need provided they embrace key reforms. One reform provides additional state funding to the 30 lowest performing districts in the state, called Alliance Districts. To receive augmented state education aid, the Alliance Districts must embrace reform strategies, such as implementation of tiered interventions in their schools, extended learning time, strengthened reading programs for elementary school students, coordinated wraparound services for students, and the implementation of strategies to attract top teaching and principal talent. The State Department of Education reviews and approves district plans before funding is disbursed. The same law also creates the Commissioner’s Network, enabling the State to provide intensive supports and interventions in 25 of the lowest-performing schools over the next three years. Each of these schools will convene a Turnaround Committee made up of teachers, parents, and administrators, which are charged with assessing existing programs and proposing needed changes to CSDe. During the turnaround audit, each school considers all of the programs already in place in their school, including expanded learning opportunities. There are currently four schools part of the Commissioner’s Network, added in August 2012.

The 2012 reform law also creates an ambitious pilot program to enhance literacy for students in kindergarten through third grade with specific interventions. Since many ELOS also focus on literacy interventions, greater coordination with ELO staff could result in improved outcomes.

Along with 44 other states, Connecticut is also in the process of implementing new national academic standards called the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. The new standards will establish what Connecticut’s public school students should know and be able to do as they progress through Grades K–12. Districts are beginning to develop and implement new curricula that align with these standards, and in 2014–2015 will implement new summative assessments.

→ Why This Recommendation Is Important

Community-based partners are a vital part of ELOS and can be a significant help in ensuring the success of education reform initiatives. Community partners can help leverage additional resources that can make the difference between success and failure of some of these initiatives. Yet the inclusion of school-community partnerships needs to be strongly encouraged if school districts are to take the time and effort necessary to make partnerships work well.

Community partners are also generally very successful in engaging parents in ELOs, and can serve as an essential bridge between school and home. Staff in community-run ELOs are youth development professionals that can support school initiatives if they are provided with the necessary information about these programs. This is often best accomplished by including local ELO providers in professional development workshops provided for school staff so that local implementation issues are addressed.

→ Actions Needed

Encourage school districts to partner with community-based organizations when providing ELOs in Alliance and Commissioner’s Network schools

Program guidelines need to encourage greater creativity and coordination in partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations that will result in greater cost-effectiveness to allow these programs to serve more children. Incentives can be added to provide this encouragement.

Cross-train educators and ELO providers to work together in creating Student Success Plans

Student Success Plans for sixth- to twelfth-grade students can be greatly enhanced if ELO providers can support their creation and implementation. Training should be offered regionally to those educators and ELO providers that work with students in this age group. In addition, increased internal coordination within the Connecticut State Department of Education would allow for better integration between various initiatives, like ELOs and Student Success Plans, as they are implemented.

Provide training for ELO providers on Common Core State Standards

As providers of homework help, ELO staff can be more effective if they are aware of the new standards and the curriculum. ELO activities can align with curricula only if ELO providers are knowledgeable about upcoming changes. Current trainings for educators provided by Regional Education Service Centers could be expanded to include ELO staff, or separate workshops held just for this target audience.
Multiple state departments have responsibilities that impact ELOs, yet not all of them are required to participate on the After School Advisory Council. In particular, greater alignment with early childhood, post-secondary education, juvenile justice and workforce systems would improve the efficiency of these programs and create better alignment between programs with similar goals.

The child care system in Connecticut is especially linked to the provision of ELOs, since programs that serve children under age 13 are considered school-age child care programs unless they are run by schools. The federal government provides Connecticut with $51 million as part of the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) to assist low-income working families with child care through the Care4Kids program. In 2010, the monthly average number of children in this program was 19,500, just over 31% of which were school-age children in after-school and summer programs. The federal funding requires that 4% be set aside to improve the quality of child care including infant-toddler, preschool and school-age care. The State Department of Education also sets aside a small portion of its funding for administration and quality improvement efforts, but more could be done to align this funding, and to more equitably distribute quality funding so that school-age programs benefit.

Interagency coordination is an essential component of an efficient system supporting programs for children and youth. Because funding for quality improvements located within more than one state agency, participation in the After School Advisory Council can provide an avenue for this coordination. Greater transparency is needed concerning how federal quality funding supports the different targeted age groups, including school-age, to ensure that state policy priorities are being supported in the most cost-effective way possible.

**Why This Recommendation Is Important**

Interagency coordination is an essential component of an efficient system supporting programs for children and youth. Because funding for quality improvements located within more than one state agency, participation in the After School Advisory Council can provide an avenue for this coordination. Greater transparency is needed concerning how federal quality funding supports the different targeted age groups, including school-age, to ensure that state policy priorities are being supported in the most cost-effective way possible.

**Actions Needed**

**Appoint the appropriate person from state departments with ELO-related responsibilities to the After School Advisory Council**

Participation in the Council’s quarterly meetings should be required for each department that has any relation to the implementation of ELOs, since this is the only mechanism within the state to coordinate between departments on this issue.

**Report on the proportion of federal child care quality funding that is spent on school-age providers**

CCDF quality set-aside funding is an essential source for systems-level improvements. Programs serving school-age children are an important target for this funding. Data exists on exactly how this funding is spent, but a concerted effort to collect and analyze it is needed to assess its effectiveness at reaching this target audience.

**Allocate a specific percentage of federal child care quality set-aside funding for technical assistance and scholarships for school-age providers**

After additional data is collected (from the previous recommendation), an increase based on this proportion should be implemented in 2014.

**What does personalized learning look like in action? Here are four samples of projects implemented for high school credit in New Hampshire:**

**SCIENCE: The local need for help with a community garden inspired this ELO, where students explored ecosystems, cellular structures, nutrition, energy, water and nitrogen cycles. After designing their plots, students also decided where to donate a portion of their produce, following up on the life of local food. These students were focused on the essential questions, “Where does food come from? Where does it go?”**

**ENGLISH: “Why Poetry?” An entire English class participated in a regional Poetry Slam competition at a local cafe, working with independent poets and an English teacher to refine students’ expressive language arts abilities. They prepared for the competition by journaling, practicing and critiquing each other. Many continued on to write poetry beyond the ELO.”**
Use ELOs to Rethink Relationship Between Time and Learning

**Background**

Much discussion at the state and national level has focused on the future of learning, with a consensus that true education reform requires us to rethink the relationship between time and learning by creating a more personalized learning system. The Connecticut Association of School Superintendents issued recommendations in December 2011 that included specifically calling for more personalized learning among other education reforms. Legislation introduced in the 2012 legislative session (RH B 5352, An Act Concerning Student-Centered Learning) would have established a pilot program to assist ten school districts with developing personalized systems of learning. The bill passed out of the Education Committee but died at the end of the session without a vote by the General Assembly.

This same model has been used very successfully in other states, most extensively and effectively in New Hampshire. A comprehensive analysis of the pilot program conducted by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute showed strong positive results. The New Hampshire Department of Education uses the broad term “extended learning opportunities” to describe this type of student-centered learning, which they define as “the primary acquisition of knowledge and skills through instruction or study outside of the traditional classroom methodology, including, but not limited to: apprenticeships, community service, independent study, online courses, internships, performing groups and private instruction.”

The intent of this initiative is to harness community resources and technology to provide a world-class, personalized, student-centered education in a flexible, innovative learning environment that promotes active engagement to maximize the potential in every individual. As they begin to scale up the initiative, the state school board gives local school boards and districts permission to be flexible and creative in the way schools award credits to students for learning in a variety of settings. ELOs in New Hampshire have four structural components: research, reflection, product and presentation, and three participant roles: student, community mentor and highly qualified teacher.

**Why This Recommendation Is Important**

Students learn more when they are engaged, and it is only when the student sees the relevance of what they’re learning that this engagement can really blossom. Yet what is relevant to one student is not relevant to another. By creating greater opportunities to personalize learning, ELOs can help connect what is learned in the classroom with “the real world.”

Education leaders statewide need to better understand the research behind time and learning initiatives, as well as learn from their peers in other districts. Smart investments in pilot programs can have broader impact only by communicating their successes and lessons learned with other school leaders across the state.

**Actions Needed**

Create a personalized learning pilot for ten high schools to experiment with new ways to award high school credit for community-based ELO experiences. The program should be modeled on HB 5352, awarding $50,000 grants to ten school districts to offset the costs of implementing credit-based ELOs. The program should be based on a school-community-student partnership model similar to the one being used in New Hampshire. (See yellow box below.)

Hold a “Time & Learning Summit” in 2014 to share the experiences, processes and structures of the personalized learning and extended day/year pilot initiatives. Education advocacy groups should partner with state and district education personnel to plan a statewide meeting in 2014 to share the details and lessons learned in various Connecticut initiatives that explore the relationship between time and learning.

**SCIENCE: A student interning with a cardiac surgeon explored the connections between biotechnology and the medical field. She worked with a Biology teacher to connect anatomy and physical systems to the cardiac surgery she observed. She continued on to pursue a medical career beyond high school.**

**MATH: A visual learner who hated math learned and applied her entire geometry curriculum through origami. She worked with a glass artist who creates “mathematically accurate art” and demonstrated geometric proofs, trigonometric functions and complex polyhedra while answering the essential question, “Can math BE art?”**
Strengthen the Statewide System for Quality and Accountability

Background
A well-coordinated statewide system of high-quality ELOs in Connecticut would promote high levels of youth development and achievement. Connecticut has many of the building blocks in place to develop a state system of quality and accountability, but still lacks a strong commitment to supporting this system financially. In FY2007–08, the state budget included an After School Quality Enhancement line item in the amount of $150,000. This funding was used by CSDE to improve data collection, technical assistance, training and professional development activities to enhance the quality of after-school programs statewide. It was eliminated a year later, however, and CSDE’s plans for strengthening a statewide system for quality and accountability were put on hold.

One of the most basic issues for systemic quality improvement is understanding the extent of existing programming. Yet Connecticut lacks a current, complete list of existing expanded learning opportunities. The United Way of Connecticut maintains the Child Care Infoline database which includes only licensed child care providers, including those for school-age after-school and summer camps, but it excludes school-run programs that are exempt from licensing. Other youth programs are included (to a limited extent) in Infoline’s other human services database, but the listings are categorized so specifically that it is difficult to tell expanded learning programs from other types of youth social service programs.

In terms of accountability, the state-funded After School Grant Program already assesses program attendance, school attendance, CMT/CAPT scores, and in-school behavior as measured by school suspensions/expulsions. These measures were created at the inception of the program based on data availability, and are inadequate for measuring the extent of the program’s full impact. Additional measures of quality that are likely to be impacted by ELO participation include measures of social and emotional well-being and physical health, although this data is not currently collected. The state’s after-school programs already utilize the Results-Based Accountability model, and by using these new measures CSDE will be able to report more accurately on program outcomes.
“The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.”

*John Kania & Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact”*

**Why This Recommendation Is Important**

Research shows that program implementation and quality matter a great deal. High-quality programs that are well-run attract the high participation levels that are needed to achieve strong positive outcomes. A new study that reviewed the evidence base to date on expanding learning recommends that “providing professional development, training and coaching support is essential” when funding ELOs because it improves program effectiveness and the likelihood of achieving strong positive student outcomes.

To achieve substantial impact on a large scale, efforts such as the significant expansion of ELOs recommended in this report can strongly benefit by adapting a model called “Collective impact,” which is a specific type of collaborative effort across sectors to solve a specific problem. By aligning separate efforts, we can create synergy between the activities among the various stakeholders. What makes collective impact initiatives different than other types of collaborations is the presence of five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and an independent backbone organization.

In addition to managing the quality improvement system statewide, the independent backbone organization is needed to coordinate ELO efforts in terms of data collection and facilitate multi-partner collaboration at the state, regional and municipal levels.

**Actions Needed**

Reinstate the After School Quality Enhancement line item to support an independent backbone organization

The sole purpose of the backbone organization would be to implement a collective impact model to manage the statewide collaboration to expand and support ELOs statewide. It would collect and manage data, help with infrastructure development, and interdepartmental coordination. It would also be responsible for coordinating quality improvement efforts statewide.

Create an inventory of expanded learning opportunities to increase access to programs

The ELO backbone organization would be in the best position to create and maintain this inventory. Working with Infoline, community providers, schools and state agencies, they could identify the ELOs that are available to students, and provide an on-line site for parents to access this information. As part of its quality enhancement efforts, CSDE should contract with an independent outside organization to accomplish this goal.

Create tools and incentives for state-funded programs to assess their impact on participants’ social/emotional and physical health, in addition to the data already collected on academic impact

CSDE, with the support of the After School Advisory Council, should identify a limited number of program quality and outcome measures, as well as any tools needed to collect this information. Incentives associated with future funding for after-school programs should be tied to the collection of this data, and technical assistance should be provided to support its implementation.
7 Continue to Improve Existing Programs

Background
The state-funded after-school program run by CSDE started as a small pilot program in 2004, saw expansions in 2007 and 2009, before seeing a 10% cut in 2010. The current $4.5 million funds forty grants, most of which provide services at more than one site. It currently sets aside up to 10% of the funding for high school programs, and 10% for programs that focus on science, technology, engineering and math. While small changes have occurred since its inception, the program remains very similar to its original model and has been successful with this approach. It was created to provide resources to communities of all sizes across Connecticut, including those that are ineligible for federal funding.

The federal government provides the other major source of funding for expanded learning programs in Connecticut in the form of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. This $8 million is limited to programs that serve schools with 40% or more of its students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The two programs are overseen by the same bureau within CSDE and a leadership team meets monthly to coordinate efforts between the two funding sources.

→ Why This Recommendation Is Important
Many changes have occurred over the past two years as a result of education reform initiatives. It is essential to better align existing ELO programs with these new efforts to create synergies and make a larger collective impact. While this report has primarily focused on bigger picture changes to support ELOs in Connecticut, a number of more detailed action steps are included under this recommendation to continue to improve an already excellent program. Since many of these are administrative in nature, CSDE has already begun discussions to consider implementing some of these changes.

→ Actions Needed
Require state-funded ELO programs to focus a majority of their activities on particular themes (STEM, Literacy, Global Education, Arts, and Healthy Lifestyles) while still providing a well-rounded program offering academic, enrichment and recreation
The broad diversity of activities supported by the state-funded After School Grant Program is a strength of the program, and should continue. Yet program quality will benefit if programs can align a majority of their activities with these five themes to allow the creation of professional learning networks to be implemented. These informal learning communities will build connections between program staff and give focus to professional development and training efforts.

Provide all ELO programs with additional supports for K-3 literacy, training, curriculum, and on-site coaching
Many ELO programs already focus on literacy activities, and especially those working with developing readers could benefit from better connections with the new early literacy reforms enacted in the 2012 legislative session.

Allow state-funded middle school after-school programs more flexibility in terms of program requirements, hours, and use of cohorts
ELOs for middle school students are more similar to high school programs than those for elementary school students. The state-funded After School Grant Program should align the program requirements for middle school programs in terms of the amount, types and scheduling of programming to match those for high school programs.

Allow successful ELO programs to renew grants instead of re-competing with new, untested grantees
The two-year grant cycle for the state-funded After School Grants holds a new competition every two years, creating significant disruption for existing program services. Existing grantees should be held accountable to high levels of quality, and those that successfully meet these criteria should not have to re-compete with programs that have not yet proven themselves.

Provide additional training to grant review teams for state ELO funding
CSDE provides training for grant review teams that read grant proposals and score them according to a set rubric. Additional training should be provided to educate them about ELO-related education reform issues as well as this report to ensure consistency with the intent of these recommendations.
The next decade holds both great promise and enormous challenge in terms of education reform and the role of Expanded Learning Opportunities. We believe that Connecticut is up to this challenge. As state and local leaders we need to keep our focus on outcomes for children and youth, and support those programs that are making a significant difference. The research evidence is clear that expanded learning programs, especially those that involve collaborations between schools and community-based organizations, provide the return on investment that justify significantly expanding this model. Not only are student outcomes better on a large variety of measures, but working families and their employers are supported and communities are safer as well. We must encourage local communities to look closely at the needs of young people in their community, and help us to implement ELOs that can deliver on this promise.
References and Notes


11 Barnett & Gareis, ibid.


13 Barnett & Gareis, ibid.


16 For more information on the New Hampshire Extended Learning Opportunities see: www.beyondclassroom.org and www.education.nh.gov/innovations/elo/index.htm


Special thanks to Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut Department of Education and Michael Moundell, Office of Governor Malloy for sharing their expertise with the S3 initiative.