

Supporting Student Success

The Promise of Expanded Learning Opportunities

Council of Chief State School Officers ♦ National Conference of State Legislatures ♦ National Governors Association Center for Best Practices

SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS: THE PROMISE OF EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The goal of this project is to help state leadership teams support student success by ensuring that expanded learning opportunities (ELOs), such as afterschool, summer learning, and extended day programs, are an integral and effective part of state education systems. As part of this initiative, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) will provide state leadership teams of state legislators, education chiefs, and governors' policy advisors with grants and in-depth technical assistance. More specifically, the project will 1) deepen knowledge of the potential of ELOs through site visits to nationally recognized programs and cross-state peer-to-peer discussions, and 2) provide intensive technical assistance to state leadership teams as they develop and begin implementation of practices and policies that integrate high-quality ELOs into state education systems.

In the midst of changing global realities, states struggle to educate every child to his or her fullest potential and to prepare them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. To date, states have made considerable progress including:

- Establishing student content and performance standards that determine what students should know and be able to do;
- Developing and refining state assessments to determine student progress in meeting those standards;
- Creating accountability systems that hold schools and districts responsible for student performance; and,
- Strengthening systems of support for low-performing schools.

Yet, despite this progress, many challenges remain:

- The achievement gap persists, and, in many cases, deepens as students traverse the educational pipeline;
- The distribution of resources to support student achievement varies tremendously by state and locality;
- Academic disparities are exacerbated outside school walls, as low-income and minority students differ widely from their more affluent, white peers in access to enriching and extracurricular opportunities; and,
- We continue to “do schooling” within a time bound system, one that increasingly demands that educators deliver high-quality 21st century outcomes within a six-hour day and 180 day school year.

In response to increased expectations for student performance, educators and policymakers must work together to provide the resources, supports, and services that can alleviate opportunity gaps and better ensure that students graduate from high school prepared for higher education and the workforce. Time is a resource that must be fully utilized to achieve education goals, and ELOs are a key support to help students reach those goals. ELOs are structured initiatives that can provide students with opportunities for academic support and enrichment, extra-curricular pursuits, recreation, and other developmental activities. ELOs can also include activities that promote positive youth development, including mentoring, character education, and service learning activities. By providing youth with engaging real-world learning activities, ELOs can spark new educational interests and motivate students to improve their academic achievement.

ELOs include before-and afterschool programs; Saturday, weekend, and summer programs; and extended day/year initiatives.

- **Before- and afterschool programs** are school or community-based programs that typically take place before the school day officially begins and from 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. on weekday afternoons. They may offer a range of diverse programming including academic support, homework help, mentoring, field trips, physical education, and arts and cultural enrichment.
- **Saturday and weekend programs** are a means of extending opportunities for enrichment and engagement beyond the traditional school week. They offer students and, in some cases, their immediate families diverse programming. Examples include: service learning projects, internships, ESL courses, parent literacy programs, and family-oriented activities. These types of programs offer great potential for engaging students and families whose work-related and other commitments during the week constrain their ability to participate in afterschool functions.
- **Summer programs** are also diverse, but tend to fall into two major categories:
 - School-based remediation and credit-recovery programs that focus on providing supplemental instruction and targeted supports for students not performing on-grade level to catch-up to their peers—in some instances, participation in these programs is mandatory and tied to matriculation to the next grade level or graduation; and
 - Extracurricular, recreational, and enrichment programs (which may also offer an academic component) offered by schools, community-based providers, youth-serving organizations, and for-profit companies—participation in these programs is typically voluntary and often fee-based.

With the exponential growth in families where both parents work outside the home, summer programs of both types have become a primary mechanism for parents wishing to ensure that their children have access to an enriching, safe, and structured environment when the school year ends.

- **Extended day/year initiatives** explicitly modify the traditional school calendar via some combination of adding time to the school day, lengthening the school year, or otherwise modifying the school schedule. A number of local school systems and individual schools have adopted extended day/year calendars in order to alleviate overcrowding. More recently, these initiatives have been designed as part of an overall approach to meeting student academic needs. Extended day and year initiatives can serve as the impetus for fundamentally redesigning the school day by, for instance, providing more time for core academic instruction, community-based enrichment activities, and teacher professional development.

Construed more broadly, ELOs can serve as a vehicle for re-envisioning the traditional school day and year, strengthening school-community partnerships, and fundamentally transforming timeworn notions of when and where learning occurs. Rethinking time and learning opens up additional opportunities to augment teacher professional development and planning time, increase time on task in core subject areas, improve transitions between grade levels, and ratchet up opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning and enrichment activities. In addition, career development opportunities, service learning programs, and distance learning initiatives—particularly when customized to match individual student interests—become strategies for cultivating 21st Century skills and expanding learning well beyond the traditional school day and year.

A growing body of research suggests that well-designed and implemented ELOs can positively impact student academic achievement and overall development. However, ELOs are often implemented in fragmented, piecemeal ways, disconnected from larger school reform and improvement efforts, and separate from state systems of education.

To fully realize the potential and promise of ELOs, they must be incorporated into and viewed as an essential component of state education systems. State policymakers can play a critical role in doing this, as they work to transform public education and meet shared state education goals. For this purpose, CCSSO, NCSL, and the NGA Center are undertaking this joint initiative to provide support for state leadership teams to develop and implement state plans and policies to more effectively embed ELOs within state education systems.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

ELOs can be an essential part of the learning day for elementary, middle, and high school age youth. State education leaders are interested in ELOs because they can help to:

- **Improve student performance**, providing students the extra time and support they need to meet the demands of rigorous academic coursework;
- **Close the achievement gap**, by giving struggling students the individualized academic instruction and enrichment activities they need to succeed;
- **Increase the graduation rate**, helping to keep at-risk students engaged in school;

- **Prepare students for higher education**, by educating students on their postsecondary options and helping students and their families plan how to meet their educational and life goals; and,
- **Develop career interests and workforce skills**, through job-related activities, trainings, and internships.

Through this project, states can address critical educational challenges, such as inadequate student performance in core academic subjects, poor graduation rates, and insufficient support for student transitions across grade levels. In doing so, states will balance “quick wins” with longer-term systemic change. In the short term, states will raise public awareness of and support for state efforts to address educational challenges via ELOs. In the long-term, states will develop the systemic changes needed to make ELOs an integral and effective part of state education systems.

States will devise short- and long-term project goals specific to their own state contexts, and they will develop and implement action plans to address these goals. Project outcomes may include:

- Introduction of legislation to support increased access to ELOs or infrastructure development;
- Creation of a state pilot program to significantly extend the amount of time students spend engaged in learning, including fundamentally redesigning the learning day itself;
- Establishment of cross-agency funding and administrative mechanisms in order to maximize existing funds, based on an analysis of available federal, state, and local funding streams;
- Integration of information on ELOs and ELO participation into state K-12 education data systems;
- Creation of a professional development curriculum for ELO staff, grounded in current research on best practices and aligned to teacher professional development systems;
- Adoption of statewide quality regulations and program standards; and
- Development of leadership academies for principals, teachers, and ELO program coordinators focused on how to create and support effective school-based or school-linked ELOs.

Please note that state leadership teams will be required to submit a mid-term progress report, due nine months from the receipt of the award letter. A final progress report documenting project outcomes will be due one month after the grant period ends.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

During the grant period, state leadership teams will be afforded rich technical assistance opportunities aimed to increase their breadth and depth of knowledge concerning ELOs. Knowledge-building will occur through:

- Cross-state peer-to-peer discussion;
- Site visits to high-quality ELO programs;
- Presentations and discussions with nationally-recognized experts in the field; and,
- Additional support tailored to the needs and goals of each state, facilitated by CCSSO, NCSL, and the NGA Center.

Grantees will receive technical assistance through all phases of the proposed project (e.g., exploration, planning, and implementation). The nature and focus of the technical assistance provided will be customized based on state team needs. During the first six months of the project, state leadership teams will learn about innovative, high-quality programs; local and state models of program administration and oversight; and research and information on costs, funding, program quality and content, program outcomes, and implementation issues.

Accordingly, two site visits are planned—one in Boston, Massachusetts, on July 12 – 13, 2007, and the other in California, on October 22 – 24, 2007. The first site visit will serve to kick-off the grant project, introduce state teams to the broad possibilities for ELOs, and facilitate initial state leadership team visioning and planning. State teams will visit one or two high-quality sites and learn about the programs, and systems supporting the programs, from relevant local and state experts and practitioners. The second site visit will again expose teams to one or two high quality programs, feature presentations from experts, and include time for peer-to-peer discussions and updates from state teams.

All phases of technical assistance are intended to enhance the capacity of the state leadership teams to function as collaborative and consensus-building entities. Thus, the grant requires that members of the state leadership team attend both two-day site visits. Each team member's letter of commitment, submitted with the grant application, should indicate a willingness to attend the grant site visits (see Selection Criteria, below).

Additional technical assistance will be tailored to state team needs. CCSSO, NCSL, and the NGA Center will rapidly respond to requests for topic-specific research or consultation, and will facilitate contact with outside experts, or arrange additional site visits specific to state team goals. A range of assistance may be requested, including but not limited to:

- Information on other states' policies and practices;
- Analysis of proposed state plans or documents (e.g., quality standards);
- Assistance with policy or bill language; and,
- Consultation concerning agency collaboration and governance.

In addition, state leadership teams will have access to the resources and expertise of the Afterschool Technical Assistance Collaborative (ATAC), a group of national organizations representing a diverse array of constituency groups and reflecting a range of national expertise on ELO partnership systems, quality, and sustainability.