

A Legislative Look at Expanded Learning Opportunities: How State Policies Support Learning Outside the Traditional School Day



Overview

A growing number of states are enacting policies to support expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) as a low-cost or no-cost strategy to advance a range of state education and youth goals.

What Are Expanded Learning Opportunities?

Expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) offer structured learning environments outside the traditional school day through before- and after-school; summer; and extended-day, -week or -year programs. They provide a range of enrichment and learning activities in various subjects, including arts; civic engagement; and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). They also offer academic support, mentoring and more. High-quality ELOs often engage participants through innovative learning methods and complement what students learn during the school day. ELOs are part of a range of supports that can help youth succeed, along with positive influences from family, friends, school and other enrichment activities.

Background

Each day after the school day ends, over a quarter of the schoolchildren in the United States are left alone and unsupervised at home or on the streets.¹ Expanded learning opportunities (ELOs), such as after-school programs, can provide a safe place for youth during the out-of-school hours as well as contribute to student success. Research shows that high-quality ELOs can have a range of benefits for youth, such as increases in school attendance, engagement in learning, social and emotional improvements and academic gains. Even though ELOs can help states meet their education goals, tight budgets in some states have caused cuts to after-school and summer programs. This brief summarizes various ways states are supporting and advancing ELOs, ranging from low-cost or no-cost policies to those with larger funding allocations.

Low-Cost State Policy Options Task Forces/Coordinating Councils

Some states use legislative task forces and coordinating councils to ensure access to high-quality, efficient ELO

services. The focus of these entities varies according to the state context and needs, but the scope of work often includes assessing the services available in the state, coordinating services and resources, improving quality and creating policy recommendations. Such task forces and councils can offer a low-cost way to support ELO access, quality and coordination.

Illinois S.B. 3543 (2010) The After-school Youth Development Program Act created the Illinois Youth Development Council to coordinate and strengthen after-school services in the state. The council set out to increase the efficiency and accountability of after-school programs, including identifying and addressing gaps in service while minimizing duplication of services; developing standard, measurable indicators of program quality and successful results; and collecting and analyzing data on the effectiveness of state and locally supported after-school programs. The council also makes recommendations to the General Assembly and the governor about system-wide goals and the alignment of youth development services and resources.

Rhode Island H.R. 5967 (2009) This law established the Joint Legislative Taskforce on Summer Learning, which explored several high-quality K-12 summer programs and made recommendations to the General Assembly on ways to improve access to summer learning in the state.

Nevada A.B. 362 (2011) This law seeks to build systematic change to enhance the quality of ELO programs by allowing a temporary exemption from the child care licensing requirement. Programs voluntarily register their programs within the statewide resource and referral agency and participate in adoption of school-age child care standards. The law also established a task force to make 2013 legislative session policy recommendations for school-age out-of-school time program standards and to provide suggestions for licensing the programs.

State ELO Grant Program Policy Examples

Arkansas S.B. 138 (2011) establishes the Positive Youth Development Grant Program, which will support programs that are either school-based or school-linked. The



programs will focus on a range of ELO activities, including academics, youth leadership, and building workforce skills critical to future employment. This law authorizes, but does not provide funding for, the grant program.

Massachusetts The Massachusetts legislature provides a line item in their state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education budget for the After-School and Out-of-School Time (ASOST) Quality Enhancement Grant Program. This funds comprehensive and effective after-school and other out-of-school time programs that support K-12 students' academic, social and emotional development. Preference is given to grant proposals that develop collaborations across settings through partnerships between schools and community-based organizations.

Wyoming Since 2004, the Wyoming Bridges Grant Program has been funded through various state budget line items (currently under the state Department of Education budget). The program provides school districts with grants to provide intervention and remediation programs to K-12 students beyond the school day, including summer school and extended day programs. Programs funded through this grant initiative encourage pragmatic and real world applications through engaging, hands-on activities. Implementation of the program is guided by policymakers, administrators and teachers through the Bridges Design Team.

Conclusion

ELO programs can advance state education goals by supporting student success. States can enhance the quality and coordination of and access to ELOs by forming task forces or coordinating committees and using the findings of these groups to inform policy. These task forces often can help coordinate efforts among ELO providers and other stakeholders. State policymakers can also support high-quality ELOs through grant initiatives, not only through funding but also through the grant criteria language. As policymakers consider promoting ELOs, they can choose from an assortment of approaches that vary in scope and funding commitment.

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Note

1. Afterschool Alliance, *America After 3PM* (Washington, D.C.: Afterschool Alliance, October 2009), 2-3.



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The Forum for America's Ideas

National Conference of State Legislatures
William T. Pound, Executive Director

7700 East First Place
Denver, Colorado 80230
(303) 364-7700

444 North Capitol Street, N.W., #515
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 624-5400

www.ncsl.org

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