

Expanded Learning

“**Expanding access to afterschool and other extended learning programs, which engage and enrich students, will provide many more of our students with firm foundations for success.**”

— NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, 2008

Expanded learning opportunities or ELOs support youth socially, emotionally, and academically and may serve as a lifeline to lifelong success, especially for those most in need—children from diverse, high-poverty communities. Indeed, ELOs are a response to a multi-decade public demand for improved educational outcomes for *all* children (Redd et al., 2012). What are ELOs and how do they work? For a cogent definition, let’s turn to the Harvard Family Research Project (Harris, Rosenberg, & Wallace, 2012):

ELOs serve children of all ages and come in a variety of formats and programs: before- and after-school programs, Saturday academies, summer school, extended school year, and other innovative programs including digital opportunities, that enhance student learning. These programs may also feature a range of sponsors as well, including childcare centers, community organizations, churches, and schools. Increasingly, schools are offering ELOs as a way to support student achievement:

- Of the estimated 49,700 public elementary schools in the nation, 56 percent reported that one or more after-school programs were physically located at the school. Forty-six percent of all public elementary schools reported a fee-based stand-alone day care program, 43 percent reported one or more stand-alone academic instruction/tutoring programs, and 10 percent reported a 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) (NCES, 2009).

1 Early Literacy

2 Family Involvement

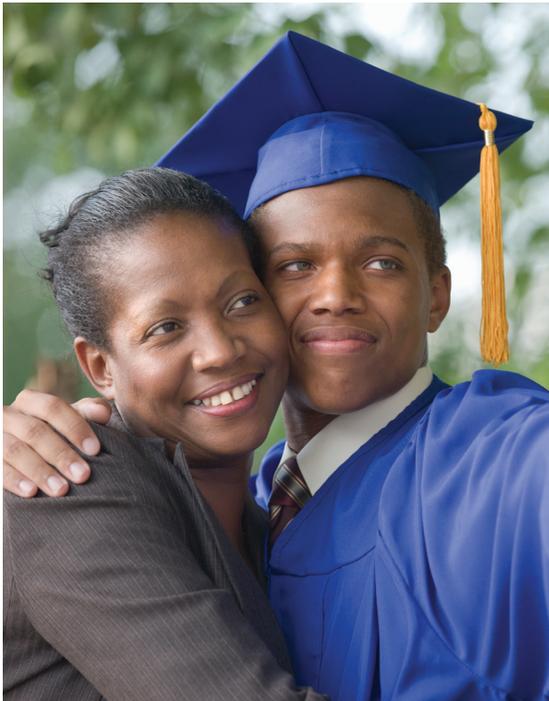
3 Access to Books

4 **Expanded Learning**

5 Mentoring Partnerships

“**After-school programs deserve robust national support—not just for the benefit of at-risk teenagers, but also for children in need of academic enrichment and extracurricular opportunities, and (not least) for their working parents.**”

—Chrisanne Gayl, Social Policy Analyst



- Eighteen percent of all public elementary schools reported one formal after-school program, 23% reported two programs, 14% reported three or more programs, and 44% indicated that no formal after-school programs were located at the school (NCES, 2009).
- Public elementary schools reported an estimated four million enrollments in formal after-school programs. These include duplicated enrollments because a student could be counted more than once if he/she enrolled in more than one program. Fee-based stand-alone day care accounted for 34% of the total enrollments in after-school programs, stand-alone academic instruction/tutoring programs accounted for 39%, 21st CCLCs accounted for 11%, and other types of formal after-school programs accounted for 16% (NCES, 2009).

ELOs also differ in programmatic goals but, according to Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (2011), they usually work to increase student success and well being in the following areas:

- Academic success
- Character education
- Civic engagement
- Social and emotional development
- Wellness and nutrition

A solid base of research reveals what’s possible through expanded learning opportunities and their impressive benefits. Besides keeping students safe and free of the risky behaviors that often harm unsupervised children left at home alone, “high quality ELOs correlate with student gains in academic achievement, school engagement, and social and emotional development” (CCSSO, 2011).

The Promise of Expanded Learning

High quality opportunities to learn beyond the school day offer multiple benefits, including a safe, structured learning environment for students of all ages and the opportunity to engage with their peers and caring, competent adults in the community and online. ELOs are at the forefront of a broader vision of learning beyond the traditional school day. In many ways, the traditional school day has become outmoded, particularly for students who have fallen far behind their peers.

The Numbers Tell the Need

Widespread public support for ELOs coincides with the entry of both parents into the workplace and the struggle many families face to balance work and family. In the past 50 years, the number of

EXPANDED LEARNING

stay-at-home mothers has dropped by nearly 50%. It's no surprise that 90% of American families report work-family conflict. What's more, single-parent households have increased from 11% of families in 1970 to 34% today. More than one-third of all children now live in single-parent households. (Kids Count, 2009).

And many of our students also encounter language barriers. The number of English Learners (ELs), or children who are learning English for the first time when entering school, has increased 150% since 1990, though the overall student population has only grown by 20%. ELs may come from families who are also learning English, which affects the parents' ability to help with literacy and English acquisition, and also may dissuade parents from involving themselves in school at all (Foundation for Child Development, 2010).

High School Dropout Statistics (U.S.)

Total number of high school dropouts annually	3,030,000
Number of high school students who drop out each day	8,300
Percentage of all dropouts that happen in the ninth grade	36%
Percentage of students who repeat the ninth grade that go on to graduate.....	15%
Percentage of students in the largest 50 U.S. cities that graduate high school	59%
Percentage of U.S. crimes that are committed by a high school dropout	75%
Average amount by which a high school graduate's earnings will exceed those of a dropout.....	\$260,000
Percentage of African American drop outs that have spent time in prison	60%
Percentage of Hispanic dropouts that were due to a pregnancy	41%
Percentage of U.S. jobs a high school dropout is not eligible for.....	90%

Demographics of High School Dropouts (Percent Who Drop Out)

National Rate	8.1%
Male	9.1%
Female.....	7%
African American	9.6%
Hispanic	17.6%
White	5.2%
Asian American.....	2.1%
Foreign Born.....	20.7%
Children of Foreign Born.....	13%

Child Trends, 2012

These challenges together with increased accountability pressure—students face more standardized testing than ever and, increasingly, teachers are held accountable for their students’ test scores—help fuel the demand for expanded learning programs that can lend support on multiple fronts, social and emotional as well as linguistic and academic.

Finally, the numbers connected to high school dropouts in the United States (Child Trends, 2012) crystallize the need; clearly, our traditional school day and schooling model is not adequately serving all our students.

It’s our most vulnerable students who stand to benefit most from the extra hours of academic and social/emotional support. Priscilla Little (2009) of the Harvard Family Research Project explains the difference ELOs can make for *all* students:

The research warrant for after-school and summer learning programs is clear: Children and youth who participate in well-implemented programs and activities outside of school are poised to stay enrolled longer and perform better in school than their peers who do not attend such programs.

What Happens After the Final School Bell Rings?

The dangers of leaving both children and teens on their own after school are well documented, and expanded learning opportunities can make a huge difference for the well being and safety of both our children and our communities. Quality programs often become the focal point of community engagement. They create a safe and caring neighborhood hub where families, schools, and communities gather in a united effort to provide support in ways that deter failure and promote success. Let’s explore the facts: first, the challenge we face when our children are left unsupervised, and then the solution.

As encapsulated by the After-School All-Stars’ slogan, too often, *Kids with nowhere to go, end up ... going nowhere*. Sadly, the research that backs this slogan is extensive and disturbing; the statistics below, many cited by the Afterschool Alliance (2008), frame the challenge and the solution:

Children Left Unsupervised

- In 2010, The Center for Family Policy and Research calculated that there may be as many as six million so-called *latchkey kids*, but the Children’s Defense Fund estimates the numbers may be as high as 13 million (Blankenship, 2011).
- The differential between the time children leave school and the time parents get home from work can amount to 20 to 25 hours per week.

EXPANDED LEARNING

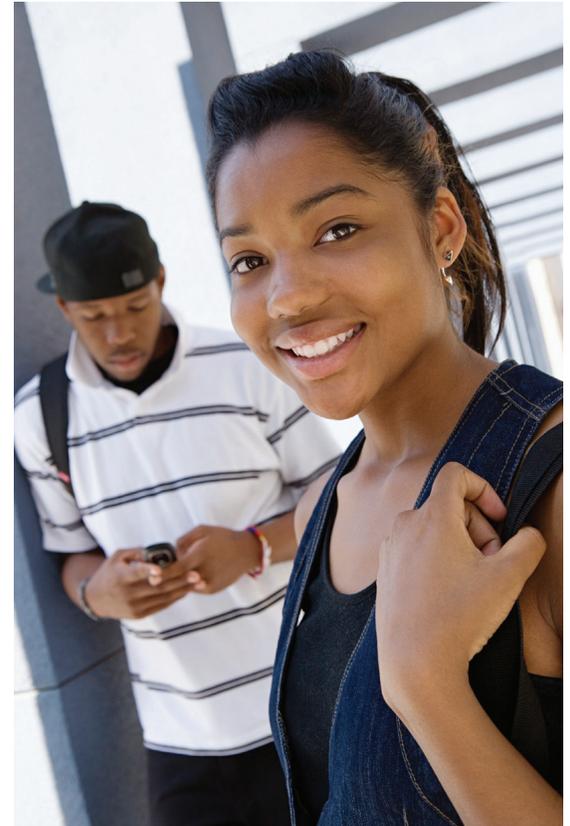
Health and Safety Concerns

- Teens who do not participate in after-school programs are nearly three times more likely to skip classes or use marijuana or other drugs; they are also more likely to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes (Policy Study Associates, 2005).
- “The afterschool hours are the peak time for ... experimentation with sex; The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center (NYVPRC) found that children who do not spend any time in after-school activities are 37% more likely to become teen parents (2012).”
- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a bipartisan anti-crime organization led by police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence, and leaders of police officer associations, has found through a series of studies that violent juvenile crime is most likely to occur between 3 pm and 6 pm, and that youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors — smoke, drink, or do drugs — during these hours. Unsupervised youth are also most likely to get in car accidents during these hours.

Academic, Social, and Health and Safety Benefits

The research makes evident that expanded learning opportunities offer multiple benefits to our children and teens (Child Trend, 2012; Harris et al., 2012). ELOs have the power to reduce crime, increase safety, bring neighbors together, and foster community pride and ownership. They are proven to lower juvenile crime rates and generally improve neighborhoods in ways that go beyond just keeping youth occupied for a few hours every day. Expanded learning opportunities help young people succeed by providing academic support and the chance to form meaningful relationships with adults from their community, and by encouraging them to get involved in their neighborhood through service projects. The advantages are numerous and multifaceted and students may benefit in the following important ways:

- Engaging in activities that help them realize they have something to contribute to the group
- Working with diverse peers and adults to create projects, performances, and presentations that receive accolades from their families and the larger community
- Developing a vision of life’s possibilities that—with commitment and persistence—are attainable.



“**A solid and growing body of literature shows that high-quality ELOs are correlated with student gains in academic achievement, school engagement, and social and emotional development.**”

—Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011

Communities in Schools

“Communities in Schools” describe themselves as a “nationwide network of passionate professionals working in public schools to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.” Communities in Schools works within the public school system, determining student needs and establishing relationships with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, and parent and volunteer organizations to provide needed resources. They boast nearly 200 local affiliates and serve almost 1.26 million students in 28 states and Washington, DC.

A return on investment analysis suggests that Communities in Schools “produces meaningful economic and social impacts.” Among the significant findings of the study are:

- The average annual rate of return to society is 18.4%.
- The benefit/cost ratio is 11.6, which means that every dollar invested in Communities in Schools creates \$11.60 of economic benefit for the community.
- High school graduates will be net contributors to their communities for an average of 44 years of their working life, using their increased income to purchase homes and cars, and paying taxes that will support police officers, firefighters, and teachers.

In other words, after-school programs may not only raise grades and tests scores, but, even more importantly, they also help students avoid risky behaviors while bolstering self-confidence and self-esteem.

Let’s explore the research studies that reveal the promise of quality after-school programs—again, many cited by the Afterschool Alliance:

Academic Achievement and Performance

Regular participation in high quality expanded learning opportunities is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores. What’s more, regular participation in ELOs is linked to significantly improved work habits and reduced behavior problems, thus facilitating academic improvements (Child Trends, 2012; Harris et al., 2012; Afterschool Alliance, 2008).

- Los Angeles’s Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (BEST) participants are 20 percent less likely to drop out of school compared to matched nonparticipants (Afterschool Alliance, 2008).
- Seventy percent of elementary students participating in high-quality ELOs experienced increases in math scores as compared with students who did not participate (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007).
- The Promising Afterschool Programs Study, a study of about 3,000 low-income, ethnically-diverse elementary and middle

EXPANDED LEARNING

school students, found that those who regularly attended high quality programs over two years demonstrated significant gains in standardized math test scores, compared to their peers who were routinely unsupervised during the afterschool hours (Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2007).

- When maternal education, race, and family income were controlled, attending a formal after-school program was associated with better academic achievement. The time that children spent in these activities was correlated with their academic and conduct grades (Posner & Vandell, 2008).
- Citizen Schools, a national network of apprenticeship programs for middle school students, reported especially large improvements in achievement among the most high-risk students, including those initially in the lowest quartile on standardized test scores and English language learners. Adult volunteers work with students with hands-on projects after school and help them develop the academic and leadership skills they need to succeed in high school and beyond (Policy Studies, 2005).

Increased Time Spent on Homework and Academic Activities

Almost all children and teens face nightly homework—and those who may not have the advantage of parental help at home benefit mightily from help through an ELO.

- Children who attended after-school programs spent more time on academic and extracurricular activities, whereas children in informal care settings spent more time watching TV and hanging out (Posner & Lowe, 2008).
- Children involved in after-school programs appear to spend more time in academic, enrichment learning, and adult-supervised play (Mahoney et al., 2005).

Improved Social Skills and Self-Confidence

Children and teens thrive in environments that are emotionally positive and warm and that provide support for developing autonomy. Some research suggests that positive experiences in one area (for example, in the family, among peers, at school, through community service) may lessen the effect of negative experiences in other areas. Students who spend time in communities that are rich in developmental opportunities for them experience less risk and show evidence of higher rates of positive development.

Fewer Risky and Dangerous Behaviors

- After the implementation of the city-wide San Diego 6 to 6 program, the San Diego Police Department's 2001 report indicated that ... juvenile arrests during after-school hours were down 13.1%. The police chief specifically cited the 6 to 6 program as one of the primary factors responsible for this

“**After-school programs succeeded in improving youths’ feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, school bonding (positive feelings and attitudes toward school), and positive social behaviors.**”

—Gary Gottfredson, Denise Gottfredson, Allison Ann Payne, and Nisha Gottfredson, 2004



decrease. Additionally, the rates of juveniles as victims of violent crime during after-school hours decreased 11.7% from the previous year. (Ferrin & Amick, 2002).

- “Students who participated at a higher rate in Los Angeles’s Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (BEST) had significantly lower incidences of juvenile crime... . Each dollar spent on LA’s BEST returns a benefit of \$2.50 to society in the form of costs avoided due to juvenile crime (Godschidt et al., 2007).”
- Reduced delinquent behavior was achieved by positive peer associations (Posner & Vandell, 2008).
- Drug activity decreased 22%, juvenile arrests dropped 35%, and vandalism in the public housing developments decreased 12.5%. (American Youth Policy Forums, 2006)

Improved Nutrition, Physical Fitness, and Obesity Rates

Involvement with after-school programs can even impact physical health and activity. Geneva Pittman (2012) reports that

Researchers from Vanderbilt University in Nashville studied 81 racially diverse public school students, ages five to 12, who went to after-school programs at one of two different sites. To see how the kids’ friendships affected their physical activity—and vice-versa—pediatrics researcher ... Sabina Gesell outfitted the youngsters with accelerometers — small devices that clip on to the belt and measure how active people are at any given time. Based on accelerometer readings, the students spent an average of 30 percent of their free time at after-school in what the researchers counted as moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, including running around or playing active games.

Gesell found that the children in her study adjusted their activity levels in order to keep up with their more active friends. As she explains, “Kids are constantly adjusting their activity levels to match their friends.”

In general, students who participate in after-school programs are more apt to develop the proficiency they need to succeed in school; they earn higher grades, have improved attendance, behave better in school, and are more apt to graduate. They show an increased interest in school, express greater hope for the future, develop positive, nurturing relationships with peers and caring adults, and, in multiple ways, avoid the attitudes and behaviors that lead to trouble while embracing the positive values and hard work that keep them on track. ELOs play a vital role in helping students of all ages stay safe, involved, and developing in ways that enable them to thrive—and all the academic, social-emotional, and health and safety benefits that ELOs make possible also add up to long-term financial advantages.

EXPANDED LEARNING

The Quality Question

A meta-analysis reviewing evaluations of 73 after-school programs (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007) found that these programs enhance the personal and social development of youth. Specifically, students participating in after-school programs exhibited enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem, school bonding, and behavioral adjustment. They also achieved higher grades and test scores. The most effective programs were sequenced, active, focused, and explicit. A variety of factors contribute to positive outcomes that are linked to markers of program quality such as these:

- Support for autonomy
- Efficacy
- Skill-building
- Supportive relationships with peers and caring adults (Mahoney et al., 2005)

Successful programs are flexible and engage children in activities and relationships with adults who serve as role models. Investigating program quality inevitably raises the question: *What activities will best meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of children?*

What Makes for a Quality Program

Informed by an increasingly substantial research base, *The Quality Imperative*, assembled by National Governors Association (2009), identifies the seven key elements that lead to high-quality ELOs:

1. A clear programmatic mission, focused and challenging goals, and frequent evaluation that supports ongoing improvement
2. An array of content-rich programming that engages participants and builds their academic and nonacademic skills
3. Positive, constructive relationships between staff and participants
4. Strong connections with schools, families, and communities
5. Qualified, well-supported, and stable program staff
6. A low participant-to-staff ratio and an appropriate total enrollment
7. Sufficient program resources and the ability to sustain funding over the long term

“**High quality ELOs make a powerful contribution to student achievement, particularly for those students who are lagging behind their peers.**”

—Council of Chief State School Officers

When these quality components are missing, ELOs are not as effective. On the other hand, when they are in place, ELOs hit the mark: they get students on track to succeed and graduate.

The Role of the Common Core State Standards

As noted by the CCSSO (2009), “Although the Common Core is, essentially, a policy document and thus completely different than

A Note About Beyond the Bricks

The Beyond the Bricks Project (BTBP) is a media and international community engagement initiative to encourage and promote community based solutions to increasing educational and social outcomes for school age African American males. The BTBP takes a grassroots approach to improving outcomes for young African American males, by engaging community members—including the young men themselves—as well as educators, civic leaders, and other stakeholders to craft solutions to the challenges they face in their neighborhoods, cities, and the nation as a whole, while encouraging them to examine their functions as role models and community citizens. BTBP also believes that taking an asset-based attitude that seeks to build on young African American males' strengths, individually and collectively, helps to prepare young men to be leaders in advancing themselves, each other, and their communities. "We work to establish partnerships throughout the country and the world to encourage communities to address not only the educational and social inequities that contribute to failure, but also to look at the change that's necessary within so that everyone is accountable and takes responsibility for the success of our children." The BTBP aims to create a national network of communities, organizations, universities, and individuals who are committed to shifting the trajectory of all our young people towards success and community advocacy.

the rich collection of programs and initiatives that comprise high-quality ELOs, ... a strong and clear shared mission [exists] between the two." Both aim to increase student achievement and prepare students for success in college and a career after high school."

There are numerous implicit links between the Common Core and ELOs; the CCSSO suggests we would do well to make those connections explicit as ELOs increasingly play an essential role in student academic achievement and performance. It only makes sense that the thoughtful standards that now govern Common Core practice should be applied to ELOs as well, particularly those that support students academically in math and the English language arts. In this way, ELO funding can be tied to the quality and accountability the Common Core State Standards make possible and promote those programs that are meeting the standards while either improving or phasing out those that aren't.

All Students Need Expanded Learning

Increasingly, we see that those students who have more in the way of multiple opportunities across a broad spectrum continue to get more, and those who don't—typically children from diverse, low-income communities—fall further behind. ELOs are an effective way to level the playing field. "For students who need extra support to be successful academically, what happens before and after school can be as important as what happens during the school day" (NEA Policy Brief, 2008).

Sadly, those students most in need of help are still not connecting with the ELOs that might provide a critical cushion of support. Research from the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) makes clear that family income and ethnicity predict participation in ELO. With few exceptions, the children who benefit the most from expanded learning opportunities are white children from higher income families.

In other words, low-income children may be less likely to participate simply because these activities are cost-prohibitive to their parents. Practitioners and policymakers should consider providing enriching activities like sports and lessons *free of charge* to low-income youth. Scholarships and sliding-scale fees based on family income may also help ensure that all youth have access to enriching opportunities.

Clearly, efforts to reach out and engage families, helping them understand what expanded learning opportunities are available for their children, and what's needed to enroll are the key to involving all children most in need. ELOs that involve families in all aspects of their operation have a proven track record of success.

EXPANDED LEARNING

Parents as Partners

Increasingly, children's education may be occurring across multiple formal settings—not only in their schools but also through multiple extended learning opportunities. The one common denominator among these various learning venues is the family. More than ever, ELOs need to find ways to engage families in more “meaningful and pivotal ways” and make sure that all lines of communication are open as all come together to best support children's learning. Typically, at the core of the highest quality ELOs, we find family engagement. And as a happy outcome, families report improved relationships with their children and a better sense of exactly what they can do to help their children succeed in school and beyond (Harris et al., 2012).

The Harvard Family Research Project (Harris et al., 2012), working together with the National Conference of State Legislatures (2012), outlines what's needed to assure that parents are able to work with ELOs as equal partners and serve as the “primary bridge between multiple learning settings.” Together, ELOs and parents must work together to:

- Understand children's learning needs
- Ensure that program goals and activities align with children's larger learning goals
- Facilitate communication with other settings where children learn to better coordinate learning supports (e.g., tutors, books, and other learning materials)
- Share key data and results regarding children's learning progress

In Sum

The demand for ELOs is likely only to increase. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), the Race to the Top called for innovations that increase learning time, including extending the school day, extending the school year, or supporting learning beyond the regular school day—through community school programs, before-school programs, weekend programs, and summer learning opportunities. And the federal government is committed to supporting working parents; note the rapid growth of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), a program that has grown from its original budget of \$1 million in 1996 to today's allocated budget of more than \$1 billion.

The level of federal support for ELOs is not surprising; the need is high and the evidence of their success, convincing. ELOs improve a range of educational outcomes for students—especially and appropriately for those students most in need (Child Trends, 2012). 🧑

“**The well-being of youth who do not participate in organized activities is reliably less positive compared to youth who do participate.**”

—Joseph Mahoney, Angel Harris, and Jacquelynne Eccles, 2005