



# The Role of Expanded Learning Opportunities in New York State School Reform

KAREN MAHLER AND NORA NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER

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## Executive Summary

Ensuring that all students have access to high-quality expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) is an integral part of a comprehensive P-12 education and a key strategy for achieving New York State's ambitious school reform goals, including those outlined in its Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver. ELOs are enriching educational experiences that happen outside of the traditional classroom and blend skill acquisition, relationship-building and fun to foster academic and social-emotional growth in students. Summer learning, afterschool programming, and extended-day models are all ELOs that, when well-implemented, play a critical role in turning around low performing schools and ensuring that students graduate from high school college and career ready.

Research has shown that high-quality ELOs lead to academic benefits including increases in achievement and test scores, improved attendance and homework completion and higher graduation and promotion rates. ELOs also have demonstrated positive impacts on social-emotional learning and development and decreases in risk behaviors. They bring to low-income students the kinds of enrichments that more affluent students have access to regularly – art, music and drama, hands-on science, organized sports, and service and career exploration opportunities –and are critical for positive youth development, for exposing students to role models and potential mentors, and for stemming summer learning loss.

The qualities that define strong ELOs align with key elements of New York State's strategy for ensuring school and district effectiveness. High-quality ELOs:

- » Are developed and implemented in the context of collaboration with strong community partners, supporting alignment with school-day learning and the Common Core State Standards;
- » Provide opportunities for evidence-based instructional practices, such as project-based learning, that actively engage students and help build content and skill mastery;
- » Extend the school's human capital and the time for learning, and connect the school with valuable community resources;
- » Bring schools together with community partners who have youth development and family engagement expertise; and
- » Enhance overall school climate and support social-emotional development and learning.

Recognizing that ELOs are critical to school reform means taking action to intentionally and explicitly support schools, districts and community organizations so they can develop purposeful and well-integrated partnerships that will result in meaningful educational enrichment. ELO providers and school districts will need targeted guidance and support to ensure they can partner successfully to deliver high-quality programs that are effective, sustainable and accountable.

Following are recommendations for how New York State can take action that will strengthen ELOs so that more students can benefit from their positive impacts:

- 1.** Increase access to high-quality ELOs that provide both social-emotional and academic enrichment activities;
- 2.** Create accountability among the New York State Education Department (SED), districts, schools and community-based organizations for developing and maintaining strong partnerships around expanded learning opportunities;
- 3.** Provide additional guidance to districts, schools and community-based partners to clarify key areas of uncertainty regarding data sharing and allowable uses of program funds and professional development set-asides; and
- 4.** Encourage best practices around ELO curricula, with an emphasis on developing social-emotional skills and complementing and enriching, rather than replicating, school-day curriculum.

## Introduction

New York State has embarked on a bold and wide-ranging educational reform effort that seeks to dramatically improve student outcomes through an intense focus on rigorous standards, high-quality teaching and leadership, and the strategic use of data to drive performance. The State's plan centers on two key objectives - turning around low-performing schools, and ensuring that all students graduate from high school ready for success in college and career. New York State is rolling out an ambitious plan to realize these goals, along with an arsenal of tools to ensure that schools have the systems and supports required to make a real difference for students across the state.

NYSAN stands with New York's education leaders in moving toward full implementation of New York State's reform agenda, including achieving the goals outlined in its recent Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver. As a partner to New York State in effecting broad-based lasting change for students and schools, NYSAN recommends the following as a core strategy to advance the reform agenda toward success: Ensure that all students have access to high-quality expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) as an integral part of a comprehensive P-12 education. ELOs are an essential school improvement strategy, inherently linked to the outcomes that matter most for New York's children - graduating high school ready for college and career with the 21st century skills that the modern workplace and a global economy require. In this paper we provide evidence for the efficacy of ELOs in advancing reform goals and recommendations on how the State can most effectively work with ELO programs to pursue educational excellence for all students.

## ELOs – A Key School Improvement Strategy

ELOs reshape when, where and how learning occurs. They comprise an array of approaches that complement in-school learning with positive, enriching out-of-school experiences. Summer learning, afterschool programming, extended day models, and ELO programs as core components of comprehensive strategies such as full service community schools are all ELOs that, when well-implemented, share a common thread - they support academic growth by engaging students with high-interest content and innovative learning methods. ELOs also share an explicit focus on social and emotional development and learning, as they offer informal environments that blend skill acquisition, relationship building and fun. ELOs are enriching educational experiences that combine exposure to new ideas, places and relationships, hands-on opportunities to apply knowledge and encouragement for students to fully engage their minds and bodies in learning.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, for schools and for students, the most successful ELOs are those that bring schools together with strong high-quality community partners.

The work of effectively educating children to succeed in college, career and beyond is a task that schools cannot do on their own. Community organizations play a crucial role in bringing essential resources and expertise to schools, complementing and supplementing what schools themselves deliver.<sup>2</sup> Community partnerships expand the types of learning experiences to which students are exposed, and bring to schools some of the core components of a comprehensive curriculum that have become less common in recent years as schools attempt to cover more academic ground, meet more rigorous standards and push for higher achievement -- all in a traditional school day that has not evolved to meet these growing expectations. Arts instruction, civics and service, hands-on science, sports and physical fitness, and vocational education and career readiness: community partnerships are an enriching and effective way to reintroduce these crucial activities.

*A high school student in New Hampshire works together with a mentor and teacher-advisor to develop an internship project. The project has to result in new learning on the part of the student and also add value to the work site. Through the internship, the student works alongside the Infection Control Nurse at a local Medical Center. He decides to examine how infection is spread within the hospital, and develops a study to focus on hand-washing practices as a vector. With guidance from his school science teacher and his mentor, the student designs and implements a study of hand-washing practices throughout different units of the hospital, relying on observations of healthcare workers, a benchmarking system for alcohol hand sanitizing use, and culture swabs from different places in various patient rooms. The student analyzes his data, combines it with research from published sources, and presents his findings, along with recommendations, to the Medical Center's Infection Control Board. The student's own words about the project: "I think this was a very powerful learning experience. I practiced a lot of working skills ... including my presentation skills, ... self-direction and critical thinking ... [and] graphing and map skills ... [it] really brought some of my learning together." <sup>3</sup>*

Community organizations are often embedded in their communities in ways that are distinct from a school system's approach. They may also be the providers of early childhood care, and may develop relationships with families that begin in children's infancy, carry on through pre-kindergarten, and then into afterschool and summer programs. Their out-of-school-time programs may be part of a wider set of services for community members of all ages, facilitating referrals to other social services for children and their families. Community organizations' emphasis on family engagement and community building can make new resources and points of intervention available to education reform efforts. ELOs provided through community programs are part of the continuum of resources - from early child care through pre-K and into school-age programs - that students and families need wrapped around their school days to fully meet their needs and their potential.

*Since 1993, the Ellen Lurie School (P.S. 5) in Manhattan has operated, in partnership with The Children's Aid Society, as a full-service community school that supports learning and achievement for the entire family. The school has created a family-like culture that nurtures and educates new immigrant children and their families six days a week, from morning until late in the evening.*

*Through its partnership with The Children's Aid Society, the school offers services for students that begin with programs for pregnant women, continue with Early Head Start and Head Start, and then wrap around the school day with afterschool, Saturday, holiday and summer programs that expand on the school's curriculum and offer a supportive atmosphere for English language learners to practice their new language skills. The partnership also provides school-based medical, dental, mental health and preventive services; and extensive parent, family and community engagement and development opportunities (such as a Family Resource Room, vocational and educational trainings, Adult Education, and advocacy and leadership opportunities).<sup>4</sup>*

ELOs earn their place as crucial elements in the State’s toolkit for school improvement and comprehensive education reform because they so effectively contribute to New York’s core mission of readying all students for success in college and career. Research demonstrates that:

**1. ELOs impact student outcomes across multiple areas.** Evidence is growing that substantiates the impact that ELOs have on a wide range of critical student outcomes. Research has documented the academic benefits of afterschool and summer programs ELOs as components of comprehensive strategies such as full service, community schools and expanded day models on increases in achievement and test scores, improved school attendance and homework completion, as well as higher graduation and promotion rates.<sup>5</sup>

ELOs also enhance social-emotional development and learning.<sup>6</sup> Not only do these programs lead to improvements in work habits and reductions in the need for disciplinary actions, but they enhance feelings and attitudes that are crucial for sustaining school performance while also helping students build stronger relationships with caring adults.<sup>7</sup> Students who participate in high-quality ELOs showed more effort and enjoyment in school and greater persistence and were more likely than others to feel supported by their teachers and connected to school.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, participation in these programs is also associated with decreased risk behaviors such as substance use, teen pregnancy and delinquency.<sup>9</sup> These are compelling outcomes, demonstrating that ELOs directly impact the specific types of student attitudes, behaviors and achievements educators and policy makers care most about.

**2. ELOs level the playing field for disadvantaged students.** ELOs bring to schools that serve low-income students the types of enrichment that more affluent students have access to regularly - art, music and drama; hands-on science; organized sports; and opportunities for service and career exploration. Not only do these activities extend learning and help keep more at-risk students engaged in school, they offer these students much needed social and interpersonal experiences that lead to positive youth development.<sup>10</sup> ELOs are especially important in combating summer learning loss, a core component of the achievement gap that separates low income students from their more affluent peers. A 2007 study, for example, demonstrated that two-thirds of the achievement gap among 9th grade students resulted from differential access to summer learning opportunities, leading to a decreased likelihood of low-income students graduating high school or entering college.<sup>11</sup>

ELOs also provide disadvantaged students with opportunities to develop relationships with supportive, caring adults who can act as role models and provide mentoring and guidance about college and career choices. ELOs provide low-income students with opportunities that make relevant the connections between academic accomplishments, post-secondary education and career options.<sup>12</sup> These enrichments are by no means “extras.” They form the foundation upon which students develop meaningful personal connections to the wider world outside of school and begin to articulate aspirations for themselves, identify passions and connect their dreams to realistic pathways to a successful future.

*In AfterSchool Math Plus, an ELO offered through the Educational Equity Center, students are exposed to math through real-world contexts and begin to develop a “math identity,” a vision of themselves as capable of owning and using math knowledge. The program is built around fun, engaging themes that help students find the math in everyday experiences. The ArtMath theme helps students explore the connections between art and math – using algebra and geometry, for example, to construct a kaleidoscope out of a Pringles can and calculate the number of images created. The program provides disadvantaged students with a high-quality math curriculum that exceeds Common Core Standards. AfterSchool Science Plus uses fun activities that develop higher order thinking skills, while also providing positive role models, presenting career opportunities, and dispelling stereotypes about who can do science. Students participating in The Wonderful Junk project build elaborate structures out of recyclables collected from home, then brainstorm about careers that utilize the skills they have explored and are introduced to diverse role models who exemplify success in those fields.<sup>13</sup>*

The time is ripe for New York State to focus on the growing promise of ELOs to deliver for students. We continue to see growth in the research base linking ELOs with outcomes that matter, and in our understanding of the connections between the skills and competencies that ELOs target and crucial academic benchmarks. The State’s plan, as outlined in New York’s recently granted ESEA flexibility waiver, encourages schools to make ELOs central to school improvement efforts. The waiver also encourages schools to forge partnerships and leverage community resources to offer students the supports, interventions and enrichments that are key to creating a comprehensive, effective educational program. This paper provides background information for state and district-level decision-makers on how ELOs developed with community partners can be key contributors to achieving the commitments and requirements outlined in the waiver. This includes an additional 200 hours of instructional time for Priority Schools.

From the NYSED ESEA Flexibility Waiver application:

The school will use additional time and/or expanded learning time to:

- » support the school’s overall academic focus.
- » accelerate and enrich learning in core academic subjects by making meaningful improvements to the quality of instruction in support of school-wide achievement goals.
- » partner with a high-quality community partner to offer enrichment opportunities that align with state standards, build student skills and interests, and deepen student engagement in school/learning in support of school-wide achievement goals.
- » build a professional culture of teacher leadership and collaboration (e.g., designated collaborative planning time, on-site targeted professional development, coordination with community partners) focused on strengthening instructional practice and enrichment opportunities and meeting school-wide achievement goals.

## ELOs Align with NYSED’s School Reform Agenda

The qualities that define strong ELOs align with the key elements of New York State’s strategy for ensuring school and district effectiveness, suggesting that well-executed ELOs are an especially useful tool for enhancing conditions for learning and improving student outcomes at New York’s lowest performing schools (see chart comparing NYSED effectiveness tenets and characteristics of high-quality ELOs on page 14):

- » **High-quality ELOs are developed and implemented in the context of collaborative relationships with strong community partners. Joint planning ensures that curricular objectives are clear and aligned between the ELO and the school day, encouraging and supporting implementation of the Common Core State Standards.**

*At the Menasha, WI AfterSchool Matters program, program staff members pull school day curriculum maps from the district’s website to access what students are working on during the school day and review the on-line Common Core State Standards to develop weekly lesson plans for the program’s “Learning Lab.” These lesson plans list specific learning targets, which are shared with the Program’s Site Coordinator.<sup>14</sup>*

Collaborative planning – a hallmark of effective ELOs – ensures that together, schools and community partners can tackle the shared goal of student achievement from different angles. ELOs offer the kinds of experiences that readily align with the capacities and practices that successful students possess, as delineated by the Common Core State Standards “habits of mind:” independence; strong content knowledge; flexibility in responding to various demands; strategic use of technology; understanding various perspectives; and problem-solving and perseverance.<sup>15</sup>

*The Asia Society’s Global Learning framework for afterschool and extended learning programs focuses on four pillars for global competence: youth investigate the world, weigh perspectives, share ideas, and take action. The model includes a set of performance outcomes that addresses a range of Common Core State Standards, and is designed to provide youth the capacities they need to succeed in the global economy and contribute as global citizens.<sup>16</sup>*

*In an effort to deepen college and career readiness, one Rochester high school is partnering with the College Board and a local university to provide college readiness and access programming that is also aligned with the career readiness strand in the Common Core State Standards. A dual-credit option will enable students to earn college credit while also participating in college preparation activities such as SAT prep, application writing and financial workshops. The planned ELO offers students opportunities for project-based learning; extra time allows for deeper research and in-depth analysis to build informational literacy.<sup>17</sup>*



- » **ELOs provide opportunities for project-based learning, an evidence-based instructional practice linked with enhanced content knowledge, academic achievement and greater student motivation.**<sup>18</sup>

The best ELOs utilize evidence-based instructional practices. They embed learning in immersive, project-based performance tasks that offer connections to concrete skills that students can apply in various settings. Using activities that span multiple content areas, ELOs link direct instruction with hands-on experience, enabling students to construct meaning and solve real-world problems.<sup>19</sup>

*At an elementary school in Brooklyn, New York, a partnership with Edible Schoolyard has led to the creation of a school garden, where students actively cultivate plants, observe pollination, compost, and harvest foods that they later prepare and consume together. The overarching goal of the partnership is to teach students about healthful eating and to link healthy eating to environmental health. Hands-on garden time is always supplemented with classroom extensions so that students have opportunities to reflect on and use their experiences to further learning. A garden session on bees and pollinators will be followed in the classroom with an assignment to write a letter to the editor of a local paper about honeybee colony collapse; harvest time and the creation of a real root cellar might be followed by a read-aloud of *Little House on the Prairie* and a discussion of how early settlers preserved the harvest.*<sup>20</sup>

ELOs also provide excellent opportunities to work with students through blended learning strategies, where school- or site-based education (i.e. that which takes place in person) is supplemented with online learning. Blended approaches use technology to strengthen learning by offering students immediate feedback and personalized pacing. These “hybrid” models enable students to access content when and how they need it, and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. ELOs are ideal contexts for incorporating blended learning strategies to reinforce skills, conduct research, and document projects, as online learning provides nearly endless options for in-depth explorations and exposure to new ideas and expertise in virtually any content area.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, for students taking virtual classes, ELOs offer crucial opportunities for hands-on instruction.

*The Thurgood Marshall Academy in Harlem, in partnership with Abyssinian Development Corporation exemplifies the benefits of blended learning. The program uses Khan Academy’s online video library to offer students additional interactive practice exercises in math during the afterschool hours. The online exercises provide students with immediate assessment and feedback while they work at their own pace. Students review math concepts from the school day and preview upcoming topics. Assessment and tracking components that are part of the online program provide the math teacher with data on student understanding. Working alongside an AmeriCorps member – part of the program’s shared staffing with its community partner – the math teacher is able to give students the one-on-one math support they need while the AmeriCorps member assists them with everything from tech support to emotional concerns.*<sup>22</sup>

- » **Strategically implemented, ELOs extend the school’s human capital and the time for learning in ways both purposeful and enriching, and offer opportunities for innovative scheduling of the school day.**

By partnering with community organizations to plan and implement ELOs, schools gain access to a wide variety of expertise. Teaching artists, musicians, scientists, intergenerational volunteers, youth development workers, as well as community educators from local businesses, libraries and museums all can supplement and extend the schools’ human (and other) resources and enrich practice through collaborative planning and teaching. Community partners can be tapped to address targeted staffing or instructional needs, extending the school’s capacity to serve particular student sub-populations.

*ExpandedED Schools—public elementary and middle schools that work with TASC to expand the time and ways kids learn—expand their school day by roughly three hours to increase academic rigor and offer a wider variety of learning opportunities such as music and web design that support and expand on core knowledge. Each school partners with an experienced youth-serving organization to bring to the school new resources and staff members such as AmeriCorps members. Teachers, administrators, parents and community partners work together to reinvent the school day to more fully meet the needs of their kids. Community educators help teachers personalize instruction, build a lively culture of exploration and achievement and fortify kids against lives often marked by stress and hardship. The core elements of the ExpandedED School model are:*

- » *More Learning Time for a Balanced Curriculum*
- » *School-and-Community Partnership and Staffing*
- » *Engaging and Personalized Instruction*
- » *Sustainable Cost Mode* <sup>23</sup>

*The Rochester City School District has been able to bring significant additional resources to schools through strategic community partnerships with ELO providers. In the city’s district-wide summer learning program, ELO providers bring added value through in-kind supports that extend enrichments beyond the offered program. One summer program provider – Rock Venture, a local climbing center – opens up its facility on weekends and evenings for use by participants and their families at no cost. Another provider, Colleen Hendricks Dance Studio, offers scholarships to up to 50 students who want to continue with dance instruction during the school year.*<sup>24</sup>

- » **ELOs are a highly effective strategy for creating a safe, supportive school climate aligned with positive social-emotional development.**

High-quality ELOs are effective at improving students' positive attitudes about school and about themselves, as well as reducing problem behaviors. This makes them an obvious strategy for improving the overall positive climate of the school.<sup>25</sup> New York State's recent adoption of the Social-Emotional and Developmental Learning Guidelines is evidence that the State is committed to realizing the benefits associated with this critical dimension of student growth. ELOs have a proven impact on social and emotional development, and these outcomes are strongly interconnected with academic learning. Self-confidence, problem-solving, decision-making and successfully building relationships with supportive adults and peers all strengthen academic persistence and foster high expectations and a stronger connection to school.<sup>26</sup> ELOs also provide opportunities for schools to partner with youth development organizations that can share their emphasis on relationship-building through joint professional development as well as through programming that can target students in need of additional support. Lastly, through ELOs, students build mastery and experience success in activities they truly enjoy. When they share these successes with parents and the school community, it creates a positive climate that enriches the entire school environment.

*Rochester's Summer Scholars Program – which offers traditional summer school in the morning and enrichment programming in the afternoon – explicitly aims to enhance school climate by offering Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training to community partners and school staff together. The training helps all program staff establish shared expectations for student behavior and ensures that the same system of behavioral support exists for students across settings – program providers know how to facilitate a respectful, responsible and safe environment for students in math class as well as on the volleyball court.<sup>27</sup>*

- » **Through ELOs, community partners bring a youth development lens - and their expertise - to the school setting. Their contributions reflect their success in positively engaging youth, families and the community.**

The youth development approach focuses on meeting the full range of developmental needs of the children and adolescents served by the program. Community partners bring this focus on healthy physical, intellectual, social and psychological development to the ELOs they offer, ensuring that the whole child is supported and engaged by the program. ELOs adopting this approach have been found to improve positive outcomes across the spectrum of developmental domains, including academics, and to reduce risky behaviors for participating youth.<sup>28</sup> ELOs connect students to their communities and to their futures, developing their motivation and their skills to be college- and career-ready.

According to the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, quality youth development programs for children and youth should include the following features:

- » physical and psychological safety
- » appropriate structure that provides clear limit-setting, rules and expectations
- » supportive relationships
- » opportunities to belong; meaningful inclusion regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability
- » positive social norms
- » support for efficacy (ability to produce effects) and mattering (be of importance) by engaging, empowering, and challenging youth to make a difference
- » opportunities for skill-building
- » integration of family, school, and community efforts<sup>29</sup>

ELOs are committed to empowering and engaging parents and community-based organizations in the development of their youth and the life of the school. Effective community partners who collaborate with schools to deliver enrichments are skilled at engaging even hard-to-reach families, and ELO staff may face fewer obstacles than teachers and school administrators in connecting successfully with parents. Perhaps because of the more informal nature of ELOs, they are an accessible entry point for parent involvement.<sup>30</sup> The ways ELOs engage with families – whether through communicating about program goals, inviting direct participation in activities and celebrations, or simply encouraging parents to reinforce new skills at home – lead to increased family engagement in other settings, and correlate with better student outcomes as well.<sup>31</sup>

*In an ELO partnership between a Boston elementary school and the Hay Square Task Force, a local community organization, a parent liaison is key to enabling the program to fulfill its mission of engaging and empowering families. The program director and the liaison consult frequently about facilitating parental input into the program and maintaining ongoing communication with families. The liaison develops personal relationships with each parent so that she can address interpersonal and school concerns, and holds workshops for parents on family communication. The program provides all families with a parent handbook and maintains a bulletin board specifically for families that features staff profiles, a calendar of events, resources and workshops in the community, and news from the Task Force. Families are also encouraged to get involved in local campaigns run by the Task Force, enhancing family involvement beyond the school community.<sup>32</sup>*

*A three-month-long collaboration between the fourth grade class at a Brooklyn elementary school and a local dance educator resulted in a special performance of excerpts from the musical 1776, which uses the founding fathers' letters and memoirs to tell the story of the congressional vote for independence (part of the fourth grade social studies curriculum). Four classrooms worked separately and together to put on a fully choreographed stage show, performed for a packed house of parents and family members. The children sang and danced their hearts out, and closed the performance by taking seats on stage and scattered around the auditorium. As the group on stage hummed a patriotic tune, students around the auditorium one by one stood up and recited lines from the Declaration of Independence. When it was over, the room erupted in applause, and many parents had tears in their eyes.<sup>33</sup>*

Under New York's ESEA waiver, all districts receiving more than \$500,000 in Title I, Part A funds must set aside 1% of those funds for parent involvement activities. Focus Districts will be expected to set aside an additional 1% for parent engagement activities that align with the National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships. Given their demonstrated success in building family engagement, community-based ELOs are well-prepared to partner with schools seeking to reach these standards and expend these funds effectively.

#### PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

1. Welcoming all families into the school community: Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.
2. Communicating effectively: Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.
3. Supporting student success: Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
4. Speaking up for every child: Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
5. Sharing power: Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.
6. Collaborating with community: Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.<sup>34</sup>

**NYSED Tenets for School/  
District Effectiveness** <sup>35</sup>

**Characteristics of High-Quality ELOs**

Curriculum development aligned to Common Core	Inquiry- and project-based learning strategies actively involve students in exploration of content, issues and questions surrounding a particular curricular area
Teacher Instructional Practices	Integrated planning and program governance allows for sharing of student data between school-day and ELO staff, enabling targeted programming and instruction
Leadership Development	ELOs link community partners to schools, bringing local resources and the ability to flexibly deploy staff
Parent Engagement	An informal and welcoming environment that encourages parent engagement through shared activities, celebrations and the exchange of information
Social-Emotional Development	Community partners’ explicit focus on youth development provides students with supportive relationships and encourages growth around interpersonal skills
District Capacity	District commitment to ELOs facilitates shared resources and greater access to targeted interventions

The alignment between ELOs and the NYSED reform agenda highlighted above demonstrate why ELOs are a promising vehicle for driving forward New York’s ambitious reform agenda to ensure that all students graduate college- and career-ready. Recognizing that ELOs are critical to school reform means taking action to intentionally and explicitly support schools, districts and community organizations so they can develop purposeful and well-integrated partnerships that will result in meaningful educational enrichment. Action on three fronts will be crucial in harnessing the power of ELOs to improve schools and transform learning: supporting quality, ensuring sustainability and demonstrating impact.

## Supporting Quality Enhances Effectiveness

Plentiful evidence now exists demonstrating that program quality is the key to ELOs' success in delivering outcomes.<sup>36</sup> And, we know what quality looks like. The characteristics of high-quality programs have been documented in the research literature and broadly disseminated, and their attributes have been captured in readily available self-assessment tools, such as NYSAN's Program Quality Self-Assessment Tool.

### Characteristics of High-Quality ELOs:

- » Provide a safe and nurturing environment
- » Well-developed systems support programming
- » Well-trained staff members encourage and promote strong, positive relationships
- » Activities are sequenced, employ active learning techniques, focus on personal or social development, and have explicit learning objectives
- » Programming compliments school-day activities and aligns with relevant standards
- » Youth have meaningful opportunities to contribute and exercise choice
- » Active collaboration with community partners builds on their resources and expertise
- » Employ a system for monitoring quality and assessing outcomes<sup>37</sup>

Knowledge culled from more than a decade of focused investments in afterschool and other out-of-school time programming has made clear that it is the quality of the partnership between a school and an ELO provider that underlies the success of these programs.<sup>38</sup> There is widespread agreement among researchers and ELO stakeholders that the attributes of these partnerships that best support program quality and sustainability include the following:

- » A clear vision about the intended outcomes of the partnership, which include students' physical, social and emotional well-being, as well as their academic success;
- » Shared expectations about the respective roles of the school and the ELO provider in supporting student success, and shared understanding about the value of each;
- » Complementary programming that intentionally targets student needs, does not duplicate school-day offerings, offers enrichment opportunities, and reflects the expertise of the community partner;
- » Collaborative governance, planning, implementation and monitoring of the program that demonstrates authentic integration, shared ownership and mutual respect between partners; and
- » Professional development that enables school-day teachers and ELO educators to learn together and from each other<sup>39</sup>

Community partners are also an investment in making sure that as schools move toward extended learning time, they do so in a way that supports overall school improvement and academic growth. Effective and high quality partners – who integrate planning and governance of programming - together use time differently and incorporate innovations and enrichments drawn from research and best practice, rather than simply extending the time for instruction or test preparation. ELO-school partnerships with these qualities have the potential to become transformational experiences for students, schools and communities.



*NYC is currently piloting Summer Quest, a summer learning program developed and implemented as a collaboration between the NYC Department of Education, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the Fund for Public Schools. To apply for Summer Quest, schools and their CBO partners were required to apply together and document their joint efforts at planning as well as professional development. The program framework required both a curriculum specialist and an instructional coach to help all staff develop and sustain linkages between academic and enrichment activities and the common core standards. And, the program set meaningful achievement benchmarks for both academic and social-emotional outcomes.<sup>40</sup>*

#### Five Principles That Support Sustainable ELO Partnerships

- » A shared vision for learning and success
- » Collaborative staffing models that encourage integration between the ELO and the school day
- » Partnerships at multiple levels of the school and district
- » Regular collection and sharing of data about student progress
- » Intentional and explicit contrast between school and ELO environment<sup>41</sup>

We also know that quality in ELOs is contingent upon workforce quality. High-impact programs have staff whose work exemplifies strong practice.<sup>42</sup> Our knowledge base extends to the types of models that can best enhance ELO staff practice: performance assessment, aligned training and coaching, and a professional learning community.<sup>43</sup> To support effective ELOs, NYSED must ensure that schools and districts have the guidance and targeted resources they need to develop high-quality staff who can implement effective programs.

#### **Accessible Funding Promotes Sustainability**

Although the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has been the largest education-based source for funding of ELOs, there are a wide range of state and federal funding streams that can be tapped to support them. TASC recently published a fiscal map detailing the public funding landscape for expanded learning, identifying some 29 federal and nine state sources that could be used to support ELOs in New York State.<sup>44</sup> Schools and their community partners who have the funding savvy and experience to capture, blend and braid these funds effectively will be the most likely to develop programs that endure and have impact. Yet, as TASC noted, these diverse sources each have their own funding cycles, administrative requirements and regulatory restrictions—differences that create administrative burdens as well as confusion regarding allowable use of funds—all of which stand in the way of building and sustaining a comprehensive and well-functioning program.

Strong school-community partnerships can enhance the fiscal sustainability of ELOs. These partnerships can make the resources of community institutions more available to students, their families and school personnel, even beyond the specifics of the ELO. The community partner often offers a wider array of services and expertise, and the school community may benefit from enhanced access to the organization's supports and services, through a facilitated referral process, for example, or in-kind



support. Community partners may have more flexibility in the use of some of their resources than schools typically have. Not only are they often more expert than schools in securing grants and private dollars, they are also likely to be more nimble in their capacity to hire and deploy staff.

*During the school year, Encompass Resources for Learning in Rochester runs an afterschool program at three elementary school sites focused on academic intervention services for children struggling to meet grade-level standards. Encompass brings private and county funds, which the district is able to blend with its own dollars to fund transportation to the program, waive facility fees and provide clerical support during program hours.<sup>45</sup>*

### **Use of Data Promotes Accountability**

One resounding message from the literature on high-quality ELOs is the importance of data collection as a vehicle for program improvement and as an accountability tool. NYSAN's development of the Quality Self-Assessment Tool was driven by our understanding of the relationship between standards, assessment and quality programming. A range of tools now exist that use this knowledge to give ELOs guidance on how to develop, implement, staff and monitor programs to ensure high quality. These tools also provide ELOs with a foundation for program accountability as well; one that is furthered when schools and their community partners collaborate to share student information that enables ELOs to target programming and track results. The information shared between school-day and ELO staff can take many forms, from observations and surveys to standardized test data. What is key is that the information be used to design program offerings to meet student needs and to monitor progress.

*At the Alexander Mitchell 21st Century Community Learning Center in Milwaukee, the program has access to all day-school data, as well as teacher, parent, and student surveys. All are used to create a program plan which is shared broadly with program, school and district personnel. Activities are revised regularly, based on the data, to make sure that the afterschool program meets the evolving needs of the students served. For example, when reading was identified as a focal area, the program not only provided additional homework help, it expanded its literacy programming, adding a Yearbook Club to focus on core skills while still keeping students engaged in fun, personally relevant activities.<sup>46</sup>*

Effective school-ELO collaborations that facilitate data-driven program development and monitoring are built on systems that allow for information sharing. TASC, for example, in its ExpandedED Schools initiative, has developed the Grad Tracker, which uses student data from NYC Department of Education on grades, test scores, school attendance and incidence of suspensions to monitor students' progress toward graduation. By carefully monitoring the students in their program according to grade-adjusted benchmarks, they know which students may be falling off-track, and can work collaboratively to right their course.

Strong community partnerships and district support are key to using evidence-based and data-driven approaches to school improvement. Use of the Response To Intervention model, for example, which is being rolled out district-wide in Rochester, relies on the ELO framework (and is supported by a district office for extended learning and academic intervention) to ensure capacity to provide schools with a full array of tiered supports, enrichment activities and a youth development foundation that will enable schools to offer students responsive, targeted interventions. <sup>47</sup>

### **Moving Forward Together**

For schools and districts across the State to optimize the profound impact that ELOs can have on school improvement efforts, they will require clarity on how ELOs can help create powerful learning environments; how they connect to academic success for students; and why they are an important component of school reform and a key strategy for school turnaround.

Many of the critical decisions that facilitate high quality ELOs and strong community partnerships are made at the school level. Principals and other school personnel, working alongside community partner staff, must ultimately take responsibility for navigating the ongoing challenges of implementing effective programs. They must cultivate and constantly nurture partnerships, find ways to integrate program planning and governance so that ELOs complement and supplement school-day learning, work toward common goals, set out realistic expectations, and develop and utilize systems for quality assurance.

Districts must prioritize access to ELOs and ELO-school integration if they are to maximize their benefits for students. They must develop an infrastructure that supports partnerships between schools and community organizations, encourage principals to develop authentic collaborations with partners through active engagement and integrated planning, and they must promote quality. Districts can and should provide schools with guidance to better identify community partners who can help them meet specific needs. Mapping initiatives at the district level can help schools find partners with whom there is mission alignment, as well as better coordinate partnerships to eliminate service gaps and overlaps. Districts should facilitate information management and coordination in partnership with other stakeholder entities – local government, provider networks, and intermediaries who can offer critical assistance developing support systems and facilitating quality programming. Access to these capacities leads to more cross walking and enables schools to better track results between in-school and out-of-school time.

*Say Yes to Education has now launched city-wide initiatives in both Syracuse and Buffalo to make extended day and year programs available to all elementary students – a goal Syracuse will reach this school year as Buffalo begins a four-year rollout. Say Yes brings together city, school district, and community leaders to plan for community investments that will allow students to achieve the dreams sparked by Say Yes's promise of free college tuition for students who graduate from the city's public schools. ELOs are an important part of those necessary investments, and After-School Network of Western New York (ASNWNY) will be working with Say Yes in Buffalo to help ensure that the resources of community-based ELO providers are fully utilized.*

*Regional intermediaries in New York are playing an increasingly important role in bringing together ELO providers with city and school district leaders to discuss how more students can have access to high-quality ELOs. In Rochester, the Greater Rochester After-School Alliance (GRASA) partnered with then Rochester Mayor Robert Duffy and then Superintendent Jean-Claude Brizard of the Rochester City School District to develop the Rochester After-School Plan. Rochester continues to build on this work while considering new opportunities to expand ELOs created by greater funding flexibility under New York's ESEA waiver. In Buffalo, ASNWNY has begun the preliminary work toward a city-wide systemic vision, including initiating a comprehensive survey of local ELO providers. The Partnership for After School Education (PASE) works closely with New York City's Department of Community and Youth Development (NYC DYCD) and other public and private organizations to ensure that ELO program providers have access to high-quality training and professional development.*

The State plays a crucial role in these efforts as well. Targeted guidance from NYSED will help schools, districts and community partners access and utilize available resources more strategically, sustain rich, high-quality programs, and ensure that programs have the tools they need to hold themselves accountable for meaningful outcomes. Working with its partner stakeholders, New York State is well-poised to act to promote high-quality ELOs that can help move forward and sustain its ambitious goals for students across the state. NYSAN invites the NY State Education Department to work with us to find ways to support these critical learning opportunities. We think one path to enriching the ELO-school reform strategy is to consider three questions:

1. How can we promote enriching alignments between ELOs and the school day?
2. How can we facilitate stronger school-community partnerships?
3. How can we enhance access to funding to promote program stability and sustainability?

To answer these questions, NYSAN conferred broadly with policy makers and ELO stakeholders. What emerged from these discussions is a set of recommendations that we feel lay out the steps NYSED can take to strengthen ELOs so that more students can benefit from the rich experiences and positive impacts this paper describes. Our goal in making these recommendations is to ensure that schools and districts have the guidance and accountability tools they need to develop, implement and sustain high-quality programs. This paper presents a strong, solid argument for why these programs are an essential part of a comprehensive P-12 education that readies students for success in college and careers. In these recommendations, we go one step further, offering detailed suggestions with specific action steps aligned to current policy, that we believe will move the ELO field ahead and help New York State realize its ambitious school reform goals.

## Recommendations

### **1. Increase access to high-quality ELOs that provide both academic enrichment and social-emotional activities:**

- » Encourage ELO programs funded in whole or in part with ESEA or state funds to offer substantial enrichment activities that relate to but do not duplicate or remediate school-day curriculums or activities and that focus on social and emotional development and learning;
- » Promote partnerships with experienced ELO providers to Priority Schools considering how to most effectively implement the Expanded Learning Time (ELT) programs, including at least 200 additional hours of student contact time, required for whole school reform under New York’s ESEA waiver;
- » Amend the proposed regulations related to the implementation of the ESEA waiver to increase the requirements for quality implementation and community partnerships for SES programs and to direct the use of dollars formerly set aside for SES programs to fund high quality ELOs with strong school-community partnerships if districts opt out of the SES program;
- » Work with existing ELO intermediary organizations, community representatives, BOCES, and school districts to develop comprehensive regional plans that assess existing ELO capacity and community needs and respond with strategies for allocating new and existing resources to effectively meet those regional needs;
- » Increase state funding for ELOs, particularly through the Advantage Afterschool program; and
- » Include support for increased funding of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program in New York State’s federal advocacy efforts.

### **2. Create accountability among the state, districts, schools and community-based organizations for developing and maintaining strong partnerships around high-quality ELOs:**

- » Develop model Memorandums of Understanding between schools and community-based organizations that reflect the research on strong partnerships, including expectations of shared governance, professional development, data, annual and weekly planning, and accountability;
- » Offer, at a statewide and district level, professional development and technical assistance for district and school leadership on developing and maintaining strong, accountable community partnerships;
- » Include measures related to developing and maintaining strong community partnerships in principal and superintendent evaluations;
- » Encourage use of community partners as resources for parent engagement activities mandated for Focus districts;
- » Ensure that new 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention Requests for Proposals reflect the research on strong partnerships in the scoring criteria, including evidence of shared governance, professional development, data, annual and weekly planning, and accountability between school and community-based partners; and
- » Include data fields related to ELO involvement in the development of the New York State P-20 student data system to support future research and program evaluation goals.

**3. Provide additional guidance to districts, schools and community-based partners that clarifies key areas of uncertainty regarding:**

- » Permissible sharing of student data between schools and community-based organizations;
- » Allowable uses of programmatic funds for ELOs (e.g. uses of Title III funds for ELOs integrating ELL students with non-ELL students);
- » Allowable uses of professional development set-asides and funds for training the staff of community-based organizations providing ELOs in partnership with a school.;
- » Best practices regarding school building usage fees, including permissible uses of funding streams to support such services, alternative security and administrative plans, and contracting options; and
- » Best practices regarding providing transportation to or from ELOs, including permissible uses of funding streams to support such services and contracting options.

**4. Encourage best practices around ELO curriculums, with an emphasis on developing social-emotional skills and complementing and enriching, rather than replicating, school day curriculum:**

- » Include potential points of contact with ELO enrichment curriculum in all model curriculum and materials being developed to implement the Common Core State Standards in New York;
- » Open professional development activities related to the Common Core to community-based ELO providers; and
- » Provide specific joint professional development opportunities for teachers and ELO staff on co-curricular planning.

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NEW YORK STATE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

*The New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) is a public-private partnership dedicated to promoting young people's safety, learning, and healthy development by increasing the quality and availability of programs available outside the traditional classroom. The positions taken and statements set forth in this document do not necessarily represent the views of all NYSAN members. For a copy of this and other NYSAN publications, visit [www.nysan.org](http://www.nysan.org).*

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