

Expanding Learning Through School-Community Partnerships in New York State:

Findings and Recommendations of the Statewide Learning Community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Expanding learning through school-community partnership is an effective strategy in supporting school and student success. Successful models of expanded learning include community schools, expanded learning time, school-based afterschool and summer programs, and education-focused collective impact initiatives. As New York State and the Federal government increase their investments in these models and more schools turn to partnerships that leverage community resources and expertise with strong teaching and learning practices in our public schools, it is crucial that policymakers re-examine state policies and funding strategies to ensure that these opportunities are structured to succeed.

Partnerships between schools and community partners have been shown to increase students' academic achievement and school engagement in all schools, not just those which are labeled "struggling."¹ They combine strong school practices with complementary hands-on activities and enrichments provided by community-based organizations, and are designed to meet the needs of children, both academic and non-academic. In New York, these programs have been shown to reduce chronic absenteeism, increase attendance, increase grade point average, reduce summer learning loss, and increase state test scores.² These benefits are demonstrated when programs are high-quality and sustainable, affording youth the opportunity to participate regularly over an extended period of time.

This paper is intended to provide a set of recommendations to guide state policymakers and agencies, school districts, schools, and community-based partners in their efforts to support high-quality partnerships for expanded learning. These action steps are based on the work of a statewide learning community on expanding learning through school-community partnerships and address the following areas supported by the findings and barriers described below: partnerships, statewide and multi-agency coordination, funding, school and district coordination, transportation, and rural schools.

¹ Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc., (2013). Community Schools Results. Retrieved from: <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Community%20School%20Results%202013.pdf>

² Shane J. Lopez and V. Calderon, (2011). "Gallup Student Poll: Measuring and Promoting, What Is Right with Students," Applied Positive Psychology: Improving Everyday Life, Schools, Work, Health, and Society: 117–34.; National Association of State Boards of Education, (2015). A State of Engagement: NASBE Study Group on Student Engagement. Retrieved from http://www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/StudentEngagement-StudyGroupReport_March-2015_FINAL.pdf; ExpandED Schools, (2014). Time to Grow: Year Two Report on ExpandED Schools. Retrieved from <http://expandedschools.org/sites/default/files/Time%20to%20Grow%20-%20Year%20Two%20Report%20on%20ExpandED%20Schools.pdf>; United Way of Greater Rochester, (2013). United Way of Greater Rochester After-School Program Evaluation: Year Two Results. Retrieved from <http://www.uwrochester.org/pdf/AfterSchoolEvaluationExecutiveSummary2011-201210-25draftwithtable.docx>; RAND, (2014). Ready for Fall? Near-Term Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Student's Learning Opportunities and Outcomes. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/summer-and-extended-learning-time/extended-learning-time/Documents/Ready-for-Fall.pdf>

KEY FINDINGS:

- Schools across the state are finding success in expanding learning through school-community partnerships.
- Partnerships help leverage community resources and strong school practices to support student success.
- Different models or strategies for expanding learning are similar in practice. Nationally, 90% of community schools incorporate afterschool or expanded learning time, and the number is likely higher in New York.³ Some expanded learning time schools and afterschool programs have begun integrating additional services, including medical, dental, mental health, social services, and adult education, that are typical components of a community schools strategy.
- Quality of the program and the partnership is crucial to create positive outcomes.
- The role of a dedicated director in coordinating the partnership(s) is crucial to the success of the program, regardless of the model chosen.

KEY BARRIERS:

- True partnerships take time to develop and current policies and structures do not allow adequate time for planning.
- Technical assistance, which leverages knowledge in the field and support resources across many programs, is not available to all programs or aligned across all modalities of expanded learning.
- These models and strategies span the purview of multiple agencies and lead to conflicting and/or duplicative regulatory requirements that must be resolved at the state level.
- There is not adequate funding to support the expanded learning opportunities in demand throughout the state, and those that are currently funded are not all sustainable.
- The competitive grant process creates barriers to successful implementation and to sustainability.
- There remains confusion around allowable data sharing between schools and community partners, often leaving community partners without access to data they need to determine outcomes.
- Transportation remains a critical element of expanding learning, and costs can be a serious barrier.
- Rural communities are more challenged due to fewer potential partners and difficulty attracting and retaining staff in the director role.

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³ Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc., (2013). The Growing Convergence of Community Schools and Expanded Learning Opportunities. Retrieved from http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/ELOReporT_TheGrowingConvergenceofCommunitySchoolsandExpandedLearningOpportunities.pdf

PROMOTING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

Research finds that high-quality partnerships create positive outcomes for youth, and school and community leaders throughout New York have developed substantial expertise in building and maintaining high-quality partnerships over many years. Building on this expertise, state agencies and policymakers should take the following actions:

1. State funding for expanded learning opportunities operating within a school should require the involvement of relevant and available partners.
 - a. Future requests for proposals (RFPs) for existing funding streams, including Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention and the Extended Learning Time and Community Schools Grants Initiatives, should be updated to require partnerships, including a lead community partner in the application for each school. Eligible partners may include community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, cooperative extensions, libraries, businesses, higher education institutions, other schools, or BOCES. An isolated school or school district should be able to seek a waiver if they show they do not have access to appropriate partners.
 - b. Planning and reporting requirements for federal and state education funds used for expanded learning—including Title I, School Improvement Grants, School Innovation Funds, and Contracts for Excellence—should strongly encourage involvement of partners. Reporting on all state and federally-funded expanded learning opportunities should include information on the lead partner and their involvement in planning and implementing of the model.
 - c. State funding for any expanded learning opportunities should allow the lead applicant and fiscal conduit to be the school, school district or BOCES, or the lead partner, as New York's 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant process is currently structured.
2. The State Education Department (SED) and the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) should demonstrate their commitment to partnerships in funding used for expanded learning opportunities in a policy statement so that schools and school districts have sufficient time prior to any future grant competitions and changes to reporting requirements to explore potential partners in their community and build a relationship with the lead partner that is best able to collaborate with the school to meet the needs of the students.
 - a. Schools, school districts, or BOCES should vet lead partners in terms of their ability to support the goals of the expanded learning model, meet the needs of the school and students, and build capacity of the partnership to meet shared goals.
 - b. Schools, school districts, or BOCES should assess the quality of potential partners on any available data, references, and use of evidence-based practices.
 - c. Once the lead partner has been identified, that lead partner should be part of the school leadership team and district-wide leadership group, and be involved in all future planning and implementation decisions related to the expanded learning strategy. This allows for alignment of additional activities with the school's curriculum.
3. SED and OCFS should provide guidance around the stages and development of integrated partnerships and expectations for outcomes. The time and effort required to move through these stages should be recognized in future funding decisions and in the assessment of impact of the expanded learning model over time.
 - a. To facilitate growth of these partnerships and allow for measureable outcomes, SED and OCFS should provide a sample memorandum of understanding (MOU) that schools, school districts, or BOCES may use with their partners in the beginning of their partnerships. The MOU should include definition of goals and deliverables, and should define a mechanism for data sharing between the school and the lead partner.
 - b. Partnerships in the initial stage of development should engage in a structured and explicit value exchange to be clear about roles, expectations, what each partner is getting out of the collaboration, and how the partners will be responsible to each other. While some partnerships may stay at this stage, partners should be encouraged to develop to the next stage if the capacity of both partners permits.

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- c. Partnerships in the next stage of development should utilize partnership assessment tools, such as the EnCompass' Partnership Rating Form, ExpandED Schools' Partnership Planning Tool, the National Center for Community Schools' Partnership Assessment Form, and/or the National Center on Time and Learning's Framework for Assessing School-Community Partnerships, to identify areas of strength and need in the partnership and create and implement an improvement plan based on results. Implementation of this plan and re-assessment using the partnership tools should be an ongoing process continued into all future stages of partnership.
 - d. Fully-formed partnerships should be able to demonstrate results based on their agreed upon goals and deliverables.
 - e. Partnerships should have a continuous quality improvement plan in place to ensure ongoing communications and alignment.
 - f. State funding applications, reporting requirements, and accountability measures should directly address the stages of partnership development and should both (a) allow for all stages of partnerships to pursue funding in order to encourage innovation and (b) prioritize deepening of partnerships through guidance and technical assistance.
4. When stable, high-quality school-community partnerships have been established, every effort should be made to sustain them.
 - a. Funding for expanded learning should be increased so that New York can continue to fund existing high-quality partnerships while supporting the development of new partnerships in high needs schools.
 - b. After the statewide data system (see Collecting and Sharing Data) is fully operational for at least two years and the data is found to be reliable, past performance of a partnership, with attention to the stage of the partnership, should be considered for future grant awards.

COORDINATING STATEWIDE AND MULTI-AGENCY PRACTICE

Given the prevalence of expanded learning through school-community partnerships in the state, and the interest in transforming struggling schools through additional learning time and engaging community resources, state policymakers should utilize the following recommendations to give these partnerships the best chance for success:

1. The Governor should create a planning council to plan jointly for roll-out and support of additional expanded learning opportunities, particularly in light of the inclusion of expanded learning through school-community partnerships in the transformation grants for persistently struggling schools.
 - a. The planning council should be made up of members of all relevant state agencies and state experts on expanding learning through school-community partnerships.
 - b. State agency representatives on the planning council should have the ability and authority to make systematic changes as recommended by the planning council to better support partnerships.
 - c. The recommendations in this paper should be taken into consideration by the planning council.
2. At minimum, the state should establish four regional technical assistance centers throughout the state to provide coaching, best-practices examples, research, resources, and networking for all schools or districts implementing expanded learning models, regardless of funding sources. Current technical assistance centers should be provided resources as needed to effectively support partnerships across the state.
 - a. These technical assistance centers should have planned and intentional opportunities to come together and share strategies, opportunities, and best-practices to ensure they each leverage the expertise of all other centers.
 - b. The technical assistance centers should develop guidance on interagency coordination to support expanded learning opportunities, and should assist localities in following said guidance.

FUNDING EXPANDING LEARNING THROUGH SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Ideally, funding would be available for all schools, school districts, or BOCES that elect to offer expanded learning opportunities to select partners and go through a planning process with the community, and then be eligible for full funding for the program on a continued basis. This would allow for high-quality, sustainable programs that meet the needs of youth and families throughout the state.

In order to build sustainable expanded learning opportunities, policymakers and state agencies should engage in the following recommended activities:

1. The state should provide adequate, stable funding so that any school, school district, or BOCES that wishes to expand learning for its students has access to enough per-student funding to support those students that will participate in the program, or to support all students if a whole school model is chosen.
 - a. Schools, school districts, or BOCES should be supported in high-quality program development through one-year planning grants, the results of which may be used to determine eligibility for appropriate funding of the program and/or to determine appropriate technical assistance needed by the partnership prior to full funding of the program.
 - b. The funding provided should be sufficient to implement the model in a high-quality way.
 - c. The state should fund a site-based director for each school interested in implementing an expanding learning model and plan for at least an additional \$60,000 - \$100,000 per school each year to fund the activities and resources identified by the district, principal, director, and leadership team as needed to support the students (see Supporting Purposeful School and District Coordination).
 - d. Funding should cover any additional transportation costs that will be incurred due to implementation of the chosen model on top of funds for programming. Funding for transportation must include consideration of adequate services to safely and efficiently get students home, a major challenge for rural districts and for schools in high-crime areas (see Eliminating Transportation Barriers).
 - e. At minimum, four technical assistance centers (see Coordinating Statewide and Multi-Agency Practice) should be funded and available throughout the state to provide coaching, best-practices examples, research, resources, and networking for all schools or districts implementing expanded learning models, regardless of funding sources.
 - f. Recognizing that the total funding to make expanded learning available to all students and families who want it will require a substantial investment, the Governor should develop, with stakeholder input, a realistic multi-year plan to gradually increase its investment in a sustainable and predictable way.
2. While the state builds capacity to fund expanded learning programs on a large scale, policymakers and state agencies should begin building capacity of schools, school districts, BOCES, and potential partners through updates to processes and procedures that currently inhibit high-quality implementation.
 - a. Funding streams should support programs as they continue building towards high-quality through continued funding and technical assistance; grant reporting should include quality measurements that assist policymakers and state agencies in identifying areas in need of additional assistance.
 - b. Funding should be announced, awarded, and finalized through executed contracts on a reasonable timeline that allows for adequate planning and preparation time and for expanded learning programming to begin in conjunction with the start of the school year.
 - c. The cross-agency planning council on expanded learning through school-community partnerships (see Coordinating Statewide and Multi-Agency Practice) should develop a comprehensive resource on public funding for expanded learning, including a timeline of the grant cycles of all available and relevant public funds.
 - d. RFPs for funding streams used to support expanded learning opportunities—such as Advantage After School, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Extended School Day/ School Violence Prevention, and the Extended Learning Time and Community Schools Grant Initiatives—should be reviewed and aligned so that partnerships applying for multiple grants can utilize similar applications instead of exhausting resources on writing multiple grant applications that may ask for the same or similar information in a different format. Each

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of these funding streams has valuable and unique components, however, and they should not be combined into a single funding stream or altered so much as to lose their unique areas of focus.

e. Reporting and grant requirements, definitions, and guidance should be as aligned as possible across all applicable funding streams to streamline data collection and to give policymakers and state agencies access to consistent, field wide data.

f. Funding streams should be broken into multiple rounds so that there are not lengthy gaps between available opportunities to pursue funding for the partnership's chosen expanded learning model.

g. Policymakers and state agencies should evaluate funding for rural schools, including eliminating barriers to rural schools in applying for competitive grants, to ensure equitability and the ability of these schools to sustainably expand learning through school-community partnerships as desired (see Ensuring Equity in Rural Schools).

COLLECTING AND SHARING DATA

In order to support successful data collection, use, and sharing between partners, policymakers and state agencies should take measures to encourage the following best-practices:

1. Schools, school districts, and BOCES considering adding an afterschool or summer program, extending the day or year, and/or adopting a community schools strategy should clearly articulate why they are pursuing that change, and outline the benefits they expect for students, families, teachers, and the entire school community.
 - a. Community members should be engaged as early as possible in identifying needs and determining the goals and outcomes of the expanded learning approach.
 - b. The goals and outcomes should be realistic and supported by the existing research on possible outcomes of expanded learning approaches.
 - c. Any grant funding that supports expanded learning approaches should include as part of the application process precise, reasonable goals and outcomes for the expanded learning approach chosen and evidence of community support for those goals and outcomes.
 - d. The identified goals and outcomes should guide the choice of expanded learning approach and the selection of the lead partner.

2. The school district, school, and the lead partner should jointly develop an MOU that clearly articulates (a) what goals and outcomes they expect their partnership to have for students, families, teachers, and the entire school community (b) on what timeline, (c) how each outcome will be measured, (d) what other data will be collected on the program and for each program participant, consistent with FERPA, and (e) the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
 - a. Both partners must contribute equally to the development of these expectations and both must be in agreement with the final plan.
 - b. Expected outcomes should align with the goals for the expanded learning partnership, be realistic, and be supported by the existing research on the possible outcomes of expanded learning approaches.
 - c. The selected outcomes measures should be feasible to implement within the budget for the partnership.
 - d. The selected outcomes measures should be input into an electronic system and, to the extent possible, in a format that allows aggregation into the state's P-20 database (see below).
 - e. The selected outcomes measures should, to the extent possible, align with those required by the public and/or private funders of the expanded learning partnership to minimize the administrative burden on the school, school district, BOCES, and the community partner(s) as much as possible (see below).
 - f. The selected outcomes measures should include but not be limited to academic outcomes on a range of

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subjects, behavioral, social-emotional, health and wellness, career and other outcome measures as relevant to the program goals.

g. Any data related to the program that is collected by either partner should be immediately shared between both partners in order to help improve programming.

h. To the best of their ability, the school, school district, or BOCES and their partner should utilize data that is already being collected to assess progress towards outcomes before requiring collection of additional data.

3. The State Education Department (SED), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and, as relevant, school district, youth bureau, and local social services district leaders, should support streamlined data collection for expanded learning partnerships.

a. The state should develop a single data system for expanded learning partnerships similar to the data system, COMET, being used in Rochester. Such a system should collect participant demographics and attendance, program details, and outcome measures as determined by the state and by the memorandums outlined by each expanded learning partnership. Such a system should be interoperable with existing local data systems and the P-20 data system. Commercially available data systems can meet these objectives.

b. Key participant data and outcomes definitions (such as attendance and dosage in the expanded learning model) should be uniformly defined to facilitate the collection of meaningful data that can be aggregated across the state.

c. SED, OCFS, and local funders should align the requirements in their requests for proposals and contracts to data collection recommendations 1 and 2 and to the common measures emerging from local expanded learning partnerships. Future funding opportunities for expanding learning should include evaluation as an allowable expense to facilitate this data collection.

d. Leaders from new and long-standing expanded learning partnerships should serve as advisors to any state-wide or local data system development.

e. Any data collected by state or local funders should be collected in such a way as to also provide information directly to both partners in an expanded learning partnership in order to help them improve their programming.

f. SED should provide guidance to school districts on the permissibility of sharing data with partner organizations under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if that organization is part of an expanded learning partnership funded at least in part by the school district, state, or federal government. A model agreement should be provided.

4. Outcomes data from expanded learning partnerships should be used by the partnerships, state agencies, and policymakers to identify and promote best-practices in order to improve programs, partnerships, and relevant state laws, regulations, and funding processes to reflect lessons learned from the data. The senior leadership of the partnership, including the school, district, and the partner, should jointly review outcomes data from the expanded learning partnership at least twice a year to identify whether the program is meeting the intended goals and where improvement is needed.

a. A program quality standards tool, such as the ASW:NYSAN Quality Self-Assessment Tool or the Youth Program Quality Assessment, should be used in conjunction with the outcomes data to help identify strategies for improving the expanded learning model in areas where the model is not showing the desired progress on outcomes.

b. Funders should hold expanded learning partnerships accountable for implementing the recommendations that arise from reviewing the data and standards.

c. After the statewide data system is fully operational for at least two years and the data is found to be reliable, past performance of a partnership, with attention to the stage of the partnership, should be considered for funders awarding new grants.

d. Appropriately protected data should be made available to researchers to extract evidence about effective and ineffective practices for expanded learning partnerships, and future state policy should reflect that evidence.

SUPPORTING PURPOSEFUL SCHOOL AND DISTRICT COORDINATION

The role of the director is integral to the success of expanded learning opportunities, and policymakers and state agencies should support this role by taking the following recommendations:

1. The state should fund a site-based director for each school interested in implementing an expanding learning model and plan for at least an additional \$60,000 - \$100,000 per school each year to fund the activities and resources identified by the district, principal, director, and leadership team as needed to support the students.
2. The State Education Department (SED) should investigate the development of an educational pipeline for directors through higher education institutions.
 - a. Schools of social work and of education should be considered for potential new certificates or programs.
 - b. The SED should review relevant site director job descriptions to replicate successful elements applicable to the director role.
3. The state should fund technical assistance for partnerships, including training courses for directors throughout the state. The minimum four technical assistance centers (see Coordinating Statewide and Multi-Agency Practice) should have a strong focus on training and supporting directors.

Recommendations for Schools, School Districts, and BOCES:

1. School districts or BOCES with three or more schools implementing expanded learning models should consider employing a district-level director in the district or an intermediary to coordinate with all district schools offering community schools, expanded learning time, or school-based afterschool or summer programs, to provide resources and quality assistance, and to facilitate evaluations.
2. A site-based director should sit on the leadership team at any school or district offering community schools, expanded learning time, or school-based afterschool or summer programs, and should work with the principal to ensure success of the model.
3. Schools and districts should consider using a director employed by their partner. While current practice varies, partners should jointly decide who will employ the director and how his or her role will be structured to ensure that the perspectives of both the school or district and the lead partner are fully considered in decisions related to the expanded learning model.
4. Regardless of who employs the director, site-based directors should have an office in the school in order to engage fully with the principal and school staff and to integrate services between the school, the lead partner, and any other partners or vendors.

FACILITATING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

In order to alleviate transportation barriers for expanded learning opportunities, policymakers, state agencies, and districts should consider the following recommendations:

1. Funding for expanded learning opportunities should cover any additional transportation costs that will be incurred due to implementation of the chosen model on top of funds for programming. Funding for transportation must include consideration of adequate services to safely and efficiently get students home, a major challenge for rural districts and for schools in high-crime areas.
 - a. The state should make transportation costs incurred by travel home after school-based expanded learning activities, such as an expanded learning time program or an afterschool program, aidable under the state aid formula.
 - b. Additional funding should be provided in allocations for expanded learning opportunities to cover all transportation costs above those that are aidable.
2. Include transportation managers in planning conversations around expanded learning opportunities. When state programs include required planning partners, as in the Community Engagement Teams for struggling schools, transportation managers should be included.
 - a. Transportation should be arranged and accounted for in initial planning and budgeting, before expanded learning programs commence.
3. In areas where public transportation is available, provide students who are otherwise ineligible for school transportation but are able to take public transportation home themselves with transportation passes that function during the hours they need them.
 - a. Passes should function during the hours the students travel to school and during the hours students travel home after their afterschool program or expanded learning day. Passes should also function during the school day to allow for field trips or travel to internships/apprenticeships, or additional passes should be provided for this purpose.

ENSURING EQUITY IN RURAL SCHOOLS

In order to ensure equitable treatment of rural schools and students, policymakers and state agencies should consider the following recommendations:

1. In rural districts where traditional community partners are unavailable, the state should encourage partnerships with county services, hospitals, community colleges, BOCES, or other schools. Allowances should be made for schools without access to any partners.
 - a. The state should provide guidance around different types of available partners for rural areas, including program examples with partnership details from rural partnerships in the state.
 - b. The state's technical assistance centers (see Coordinating Statewide and Multi-Agency Practice) serving rural communities should provide dedicated resources towards partnership support for rural schools.
2. In rural districts, the funding opportunities for expanding learning should allow directors to work with multiple sites if the district can show that a dedicated director at each site is not possible.
 - a. The director should still participate in the leadership team at each school they work with in addition to the district-wide leadership group.
 - b. The director should leverage resources across multiple sites, as appropriate.
3. Policymakers and state agencies should evaluate funding for rural schools, including eliminating barriers to rural schools in applying for competitive grants, to ensure equity and the ability of these schools to sustainably expand learning through school-community partnerships as desired.

