

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

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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.



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