

Expanded Learning Opportunities: A Guide for Policymakers

The New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN), a public-private partnership of youth development and education organizations and agencies, proposes that every child in New York State should have access to opportunities that create a seamless learning day, in and out of school, every day, all year long. Schools and community partners must work together to ensure the availability of high-quality programs and services for children in a variety of settings.

Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) include high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs in school and community settings. They also include extended day and year programs that focus on reshaping where, when, and how learning occurs by providing more – and different – **learning and youth development opportunities**.

Therefore, high-quality ELOs:

- » Provide sufficient **time** for meaningful, active, and collaborative learning
- » Ensure **quality** by utilizing **evidence-based practices**
- » Tap into the expertise of **community partners**
- » Focus on **results** that measure desired youth and program outcomes
- » Provide **enrichment and acceleration** opportunities
- » Employ principles of **positive youth development** to provide opportunities for social and emotional development, leadership, and improved health and wellness

Current educational experiences do not fully meet all students' learning needs and interests, especially for disengaged students who are most at-risk for dropping out of school. ELOs supplement and complement rich school day learning. They provide venues for students to apply and expand their learning through opportunities that are experiential and teamwork-based, support social and emotional development, and/or develop problem-solving and leadership skills.

The public is looking for responsive leadership, especially in a policy and funding context where resources are scarce while the demand and need for core services for children and families continue to grow, particularly for New York State's most vulnerable populations. High-quality afterschool and expanded learning programs are as necessary to the well-being of children, families, and communities as the other elements of a comprehensive learning system.

Leaders who support afterschool programs and other ELOs understand that:

- » Communities that take collective responsibility for children's well-being are more likely to get desired outcomes for kids, schools, and communities.
- » Strengthening this system of primary services is a wise public investment and preventive measure that minimizes interventions necessary to address problems later in school and life.
- » Afterschool programs and the services they provide are key strategies to promote educational achievement and attainment.
 - » There is overwhelming public support for these services: recent survey data show that **93%** of adults surveyed strongly support afterschool programs, and **86%** support public funding for them.

High-quality afterschool programs and other ELOs provide broad social, educational, economic, community, and workforce benefits. For example, they:

SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS through activities that strengthen academic and social skills, foster confidence and higher educational and career aspirations, and keep kids engaged in school and on track to graduation.

- » Impacts include increased high school graduation rates, resulting in increased lifetime earnings for graduates, higher tax contributions for government, and savings to taxpayers through reduced interventions later in life.

PROMOTE HEALTHY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT through health education, opportunities to engage in positive physical activity, and experiences that develop the ability to make healthy choices that are essential for success in school, work, and life.

- » Impacts include decreased obesity rates, improved nutrition for children and youth, and less hunger insecurity for kids and their families.

PROVIDE SUPPORTS TO THE CURRENT WORKFORCE that supply the invaluable child care function that working families need.

- » Impacts include helping parents balance work and family life by ensuring safe and enriching experiences for children while parents are at work.

DECREASE RISK-TAKING AMONG YOUTH by reducing opportunities for youth to engage in negative behaviors. Unsupervised youth are significantly more at-risk between the hours of 3PM and 6PM than those who participate in high-quality programs.

- » Impacts include reductions in the incidence of unsupervised teens engaging in alcohol, tobacco, or drug use, sexual activity, and/or interactions with the criminal justice system (as perpetrators or victims).

DEVELOP THE FUTURE WORKFORCE through service, skill-building, early employment, or internship opportunities for older youth, which facilitates their leadership development as many such opportunities involve working with and mentoring younger children.

- » Impacts include acquiring communication and problem-solving skills essential for future success in college and work, as well as higher levels of self-esteem, educational aspirations, and commitments to school and community.

We urge policy leaders and decision-makers to join us in working toward a youth-services system that:

Values afterschool programs and other ELOs as primary services:

- » A shared commitment to and accountability for supporting children, families, and communities must include afterschool programs and other ELOs that provide youth development, enrichment, and academic opportunities for children while meeting the child care needs of working families.

Recognizes the demand for programs beyond the classroom:

- » The public overwhelmingly supports the value and impact of afterschool programs and other ELOs. Voters understand the need for enriching programs for children and safe child care options for working families.

Establishes afterschool programs and other ELOs as policy priorities:

- » Funding and policy commitments and investments that expand the availability of, and access to, afterschool programs and other ELOs are essential to strengthening the system statewide.

Ensures access to a range of programs and services for youth:

- » All children in New York State deserve access to a comprehensive system of services that includes high-quality afterschool programs and other ELOs, including summer learning experiences, leadership and citizenship development, and career and college readiness initiatives.

Supports the afterschool and ELO workforce:

- » Training, professional development, and program quality initiatives will help ensure high-quality services and programming for children and maximize the impact of public investments.

Encourages collaboration and facilitates coordination across sectors and agencies:

- » The afterschool and ELO system must work with a full range of child-serving agencies and systems toward common goals. These include public education, early care and education, child welfare, youth employment, juvenile justice, mental health, and health agencies.