



# Expanded Learning in Providence



Explore. Engage. Connect.



A Public-Private Partnership

## What Is It?

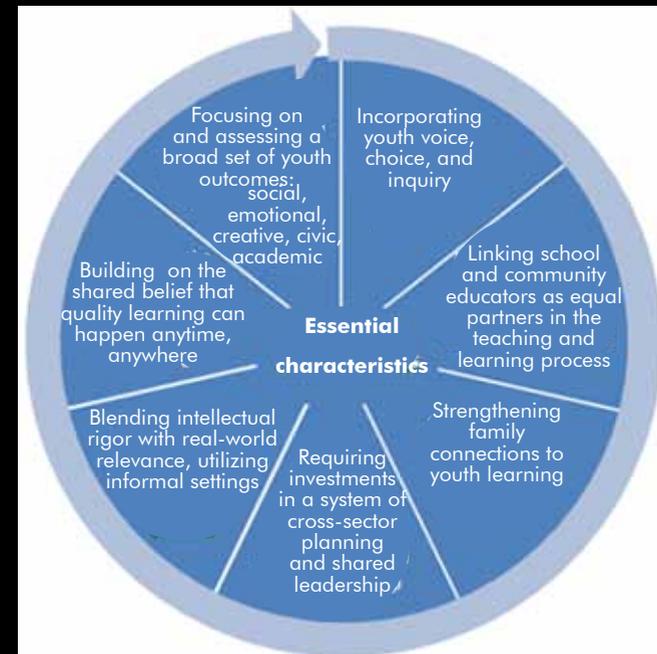
For the past 8 years in Providence, RI, the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has partnered with the city, the school department and dozens of community organizations to create an after school system for the young people of Providence. That system was built on the notion that after school has something important to contribute to the healthy academic, social, emotional, and physical growth of young people. Over time, the partnerships and practice that make up that system have become more sophisticated. Today, responding to a growing recognition among educators and policymakers that after school is a core learning and developmental support that has the potential to be integrated with schools to support a seamless school day, Providence is growing a new expanded learning model to complement and enhance the strong after school systems we have already built for middle and high school students in the city.

“Expanded learning” is a relatively new term to describe an age-old challenge for the after school field – how to reengage young people in learning in a way that excites them, stimulates their curiosity, and connects them to new experiences. Although the field is wrestling with what shape expanded learning should take, promising practices have begun to emerge around the country and clear characteristics of effective expanded learning opportunities are beginning to emerge. PASA, in partnership with the Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance (RIASPA), convened a working group of key stakeholders from school districts, charter schools, community-based organizations, and higher education and research institutions from across the state to review, amend, and affirm a set of essential characteristics of expanded learning based on promising practices happening here in the state of Rhode Island and the city of Providence.

These core elements highlight that expanded learning is about more intentional connections between the community and schools, not only through academic content, but through shared teaching and real-world experiences. It is about combining the hands-on youth development approach to after school with the pedagogical focus of the school day, resulting in rigorous experiences for youth. And it is about helping young people to be successful through relevant learning that addresses all of their needs – academic, social, emotional, and physical – through a full-day, full-year strategy that doesn’t segment their lives or their learning into unrelated chunks of time.



The Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and the RI Afterschool Plus Alliance co-convened a group of stakeholders from across state in late 2011 to define expanded learning within the Providence and Rhode Island contexts.



## AfterZone Summer Scholars Program

### Expanded learning in action...

In one Summer Scholars cohort, students in the SailZone program at the Community Boating Center learned to sail, but they also took measurements of daily wind speed and angles, temperature, and air pressure. Back in the classroom, they graphed those figures over time and talked about the impact of each on the velocity of their boats.

In close partnership with Providence Public Schools, the Summer Scholars program targets middle school youth who are testing below proficiency in math and literacy. The program provides students with hand-on, community-based field learning experiences that focus on building science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills. Teaching teams consisting of a community-based STEM educator, a district teacher, and an AfterZone staff member co-develop and co-teach a collaborative curriculum which connects STEM and literacy skills with hands-on field research. Twice a week students are out in the field engaging in hands-on learning, led by the teaching teams.

On the remaining days students move into the classroom for direct instruction in mathematics led by certified math “specialist” teachers and which are directly related to data collected during the field experiences and English language arts from district teachers certified in those subjects. The “generalist” teacher and AfterZone staff member travel with them into the classroom to help make connections between the field work and the classroom learning – and use these to work with youth in developing literacy-based articulations of their learning, ranging from PowerPoint presentations and poetic or dramatic pieces to spoken word and other persuasive artistic expressions. Moving forward, PASA plans to continue its joint ventures with the district in the summer to provide more students with a hands-on learning experience designed to re-engage them in STEAM subjects and build their confidence and skill. In addition, including afternoon camp-like activities blended with additional learning experiences (or academic remediation) will allow this to become a full-day experience which will serve as the district’s official “summer school” offering for youth. The program is funded through a combination of foundation and Title I funding.

### What Does it Look Like?

For the past 3 years, PASA has worked to develop expanded learning models at the middle and high school level that incorporate the essential characteristics to the left.

A grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has allowed Providence to create a Director of Expanded Learning position which, being jointly hired and managed by PASA and the Providence Public Schools, serves as both a fulcrum and translator between the school and community efforts. The director has been instrumental in shaping these models in partnership with school district leadership, school administrators and faculty – and just as importantly, with PASA leadership and community-based educators and organizations.





## AfterZone Scholars School-year Program

For the 2011-12 school-year, the school day at one federally mandated turnaround middle school in Providence has been extended by one hour. The school principal and district invited PASA to jointly plan a strategy to fill the extra hour with educational programs that combine academics with high-quality inquiry-based, hands-on learning that builds upon the summer model and existing community partnerships.

Together, PASA, two lead community partners from the summer program, and school leadership engaged in planning a final-period class that is now being piloted with 40 students and will expand to 150 students next year. As with the summer model, this "7th period" class is co-taught as part of the school day by a certified teacher and a community educator, supported by pre-service teachers through a PASA AmeriCorps program.

### Expanded learning in action...

One cohort of students in the Roger Williams Middle School AfterZone Scholars Program spends two days per week with Save the Bay. During a typical week this fall, they went out on a boat on Narragansett Bay (a first for most), and collected water samples. Back in the classroom, they looked at those samples under the microscope to identify and classify plankton and other sea life and then charted and graphed the types of sea life identified.

For the school-year version of the program which operates each week that school is in session, off-campus field learning experiences occur two days a week while the regular AfterZone after-school programs are in session. On the other three classroom days, the teachers and AmeriCorps members work with students on related academic projects linked to the themes and learning of the field experiences in preparation for a culminating semester-end showcases of what has been learned. The program is being funded through a federal school improvement grant.



## High School Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) for Credit Program

This ELO initiative is part of a statewide pilot with two other school districts facilitated by RIASPA and supported by the state department of education. For the past year and more, PASA has worked in partnership with district administrators, faculty and students from a federally mandated turnaround high school and a team of community partners to develop policy, infrastructure, and a model of practice for high school youth allowing them to receive high school credit for quality out-of-classroom learning.

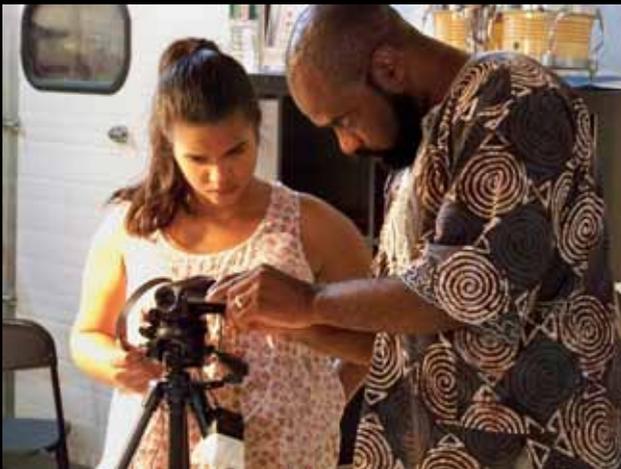
Students are required to score proficient or exemplary on a series of rubrics in order to gain academic credit for the ELO, with these being a combination of elective credits or credits to meet their technology or art graduation requirement. By creating and codifying a credit-bearing expanded learning program, PASA, the district and participating community partners are able to foster exploration, skill-building, and increased engagement for participating students, both in and out-of-school.

Funding for the planning process came through the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Rhode Island Foundation, and the program pilot has been implemented by 13 community educators. PASA oversees the program implementation, policy development and evaluation. Future plans call for a combination of Title I and private funding to provide stipends for participating community educators.

### Expanded learning in action...

High school students took part in an ELO led by PASA's Technology Coordinator, learning how to write the code for developing their own personal websites. In addition to meeting their technology requirement toward graduation, two students were hired by PASA to assist the Coordinator in coding the website students and educators will use for creating and communicating about future ELOs.

### High School ELO



Each ELO experience maximizes student learning by combining field work with a community educator, research, weekly reflections, and regular meetings with a teacher mentor to create a dynamic, in-depth expanded learning course.

Participating students choose from a menu of programs provided by a variety of community organizations. They then work with their mentor community educator and a partner classroom teacher to develop a learning plan that includes benchmarks and goals, alignment with state standards and school expectations, weekly reflections and documentation (using an online tool designed by PASA), the design of a final product/project, and a final oral and visual presentation about their ELO work to be presented in front of a review panel.

## Building a Community of Practice

PASA strongly believes that collaborative approaches to education are important for both youth and educators. The Summer Scholars program instructors (teachers and community educators) participate in 25 hours of pre-planning and training and meet weekly during the program to debrief and plan their activities.

PASA has begun engaging our STEM Learning Community—a group of 15 STEM community organizations, district math and science teachers, and faculty from Rhode Island College (RIC)—in intensive professional development grounded in educational theory on inquiry-based teaching methods. Targeted, ongoing professional development that brings teacher and community educators together moves PASA closer to a full-day/full-year system grounded in blended practice. This has included recent work at the expanded learning middle school, where nine faculty members and twelve community agencies are jointly taking part in professional development and planning led by RIC education professors.

Those individual will continue to observe, coach, and plan with one another, building their own blended practice to jointly lead STEM-learning during the summer and school-year. All of these efforts incorporate discussion and planning based on a set of inquiry-based elements identified by the STEM Learning Community.

### Expanded learning in action...

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## Critical Elements of High-Quality Inquiry-Based Learning in Informal STEM Education Settings

Informal science education offers a unique opportunity for after-school providers to use the following elements of inquiry-based learning to bridge the relevance and rigor of both in-school and out-of-school learning. These elements are offered to help guide informal science educators in mentoring and being mentored by youth and other educators. They are also meant to guide the development and candid assessment of programs to improve the quality of learning experiences for youth. The hope is that these elements will help educators not only increase the content knowledge of youth, but more importantly, that they will strengthen the critical thinking skills of youth while deepening their interest and engagement in STEM fields.

### Elements that make inquiry STEM education most meaningful for youth participants:

Youth guide, shape, and lead their own learning in partnership with educators.

Educators are facilitators of youth learning, not just transmitters of knowledge.

Learning is engaging and fun for youth and adults.

Youth engage in real-world applications and problem-solving which are personally meaningful.

### Elements of the inquiry-based learning process:

Activate prior knowledge about particular topics.

Develop explanations around questions posed by youth and educators.

Engage youth in hands-on exploration and observation through data collection, analysis, and using evidence to form conclusions.

Provide opportunities for youth and educators to reflect upon what has been learned.

Empower youth to publicly demonstrate and articulate their content and process learning.

The elements were developed and adopted by a Providence-based STEM Learning Community of both informal and formal educators, a group which continues to meet regularly to discuss and share ways to improve their inquiry-based practices in the community and in the classroom.

THE EXPANDED LEARNING WORK IN PROVIDENCE IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE  
GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING GROUPS:



To expand and improve quality after-school, summer, and other expanded learning opportunities for the youth of Providence by organizing a sustainable public private system that contributes to student success and serves as a national model.

