

# Closing the Gap through Extended Learning Opportunities

*Expanding access to afterschool and other extended learning programs which engage and enrich students will provide many more of our students with firm foundations for success. And it will help reduce stress on many working parents to know their children are safe and supervised.*

—NEA President Dennis Van Roekel

**E**xtended learning opportunities (ELOs) include a broad range of programs that provide children with academic enrichment and/or supervised activities beyond the traditional school day and, in some cases, beyond the traditional school year. Programs that provide extended learning opportunities can be categorized by the targeted age group: school-age (typically children up to the age of 12) or adolescent (children 12 and older). They also can be grouped according to their purposes—such as child care (before and after the school day), youth development, or extra time for learning. Well planned and coordinated ELOs can support learning while providing safe, positive activities for children and young people to explore their interests and develop their talents.

ELOs for school-age children include before- and after-school programs, Saturday academies, summer school, extended school year, and other innovative programs that enhance student learning. These programs may be sponsored by a variety of providers such as child care centers, community organizations, and churches, as well as by schools. Many schools offer extended learning programs as a strategy for improving or enhancing student achievement.<sup>1</sup> ELOs for adolescents also vary in purpose and providers, although these programs typically promote academic achievement, engage students in the community, and develop leadership

skills, as well as prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors.

## Why are extended learning opportunities important?

Students come to school from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences. Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and children from low-income households often enter kindergarten less prepared than their white middle-class counterparts and often lag behind in school throughout adolescence.<sup>2</sup> For students who need extra support to be successful academically, what happens before and after school can be as important as what happens during the school day. The children who could benefit the most from ELOs, however, typically have fewer opportunities to participate in high quality, affordable extended learning programs.<sup>3</sup> When school-age children and teens do not have access to such programs and are left unsupervised after school, they are more likely to receive poor grades, drop out of school, and engage in high risk behaviors than children who participate in constructive activities supervised by responsible adults.<sup>4</sup>

## Extended learning opportunities help struggling students

Research suggests that regular participation in programs that provide academic and social activities contribute positively to children's academic and social development. A meta-analysis of afterschool

programs that focused on personal and social development found that the programs did, in fact, have a positive impact on students' grades, academic achievement, and self esteem.<sup>5</sup> Programs that extend the school year can do more than reduce summer learning loss—they can increase academic achievement, especially for children in poverty. However, researchers point out that simply extending the school day or school year has little effect on student learning unless programs make use of effective teaching strategies and curricula designed to engage students.

Extended learning opportunities for middle and high school students have benefits beyond academic improvement. Programs that serve adolescents are valuable to the community because they have been linked to lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, vandalism, and juvenile crime. The programs for adolescents that are most effective focus on service learning and personal development; they have been found to boost academic achievement, build leadership, and strengthen ties to the community.<sup>6</sup>

### What do high quality extended learning opportunities look like?

Researchers and practitioners agree that effective extended learning programs combine three components—academic enrichment, cultural activities, and recreational opportunities—that guide learning and engage children and youth.<sup>7</sup> High quality ELOs:

- Enrich learning opportunities for students by complementing rather than duplicating school learning;
- Employ and adequately compensate qualified staff and management;
- Provide regular professional development and career advancement opportunities for staff and volunteers;

- Develop partnerships between community organizations that share the goals of promoting learning and community engagement;
- Create relationships between ELO staff and school staff so that the use of resources and facilities are coordinated and maximized;
- Place appropriate attention on safety, health, and nutrition;
- Emphasize family involvement in children's learning and development;
- Receive adequate and sustainable funding;
- Evaluate program effectiveness and seek continuous improvement.

There are a number high quality afterschool programs that have documented their results:

- Participants in LA's BEST, a citywide elementary after-school program in Los Angeles, showed improved school day attendance and higher aspirations for high school and college education. The dropout rates among LA's BEST students is 20 percent lower than the overall district dropout rate.<sup>8</sup>
- Families and partner schools connected with Tenacity, a program offering 3,000 Boston students tennis instruction and academic enrichment during the summer and after school, report high satisfaction with the program and increased academic skills development in students.<sup>9</sup>

Well planned service learning programs provide young people with opportunities to develop problem solving skills, citizenship, responsibility, and discipline. Examples of quality programs include:

- Citizen Schools, a national network of apprenticeship programs for middle school students. Adult volunteers work with students in hands-on learning projects after school,

and participants develop the academic and leadership skills they need to do well in high school and college and become leaders in their careers and in their communities.<sup>10</sup>

- The Extended Day Program in Peekskill, New York, incorporates cultural, recreational, and civic resources to complement classroom instruction. The students learn leadership skills by serving as docents at art museums or volunteers at the community health center. Students show significant academic progress and greater self-discipline.<sup>11</sup>
- Young Audiences Inc. (YAI), a nationwide not-for-profit arts-in-education organization, provides in-school, after-school, summer, and family programs. YAI offers artistic and educational development for public school students by bringing young people together with professional artists of all disciplines to learn, create, and participate in the arts. Research shows a correlation between arts education and improvements in academic performance and standardized test scores, increases in student attendance, and decreases in school dropout rates.<sup>12</sup>

### Several states are extending the school day to help students in need

Policymakers and school administrators in several states are extending the school day as a strategy to provide additional learning time for struggling students. The following extended day initiatives show promise:

- Massachusetts is funding a \$13 million public-private partnership to lengthen the school day. Ten middle schools have already received funding to add at least 300 hours to the current school schedule. The extra time is used for a mix of additional classroom time plus enrichment activities and includes collaboration with afterschool providers and other community

based organizations. Additional schools received planning grants in November 2007.

- New York has extended the school day by 37.5 minutes, Monday through Thursday, for underperforming students.
- Lawmakers in Connecticut are proposing a longer school day for “persistently failing schools” as part of a \$1 billion increase in education spending.
- Policymakers in Delaware, Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania are all considering lengthening the school day in an effort to meet the standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Every community should offer a variety of ELOs with differing goals and approaches that serve children in every age group. Whenever possible, linkages between schools and community partners should be made to eliminate duplication and maximize resources, expand availability and access, and ensure alignment of education goals.

### Funding support for school-based and school-linked ELOs

Several funding streams within the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 can be used to support extended learning opportunities. These funding streams include the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program (21st CCLC), Title I (general Title I, School Improvement, and Supplemental Educational Services), Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC), Comprehensive School Reform (CSR), and Innovative Programs.<sup>13</sup>

Of the five federal programs, only Title I, Part A and 21st CCLC represent fairly stable sources of support for extended learning opportunities in the next few years. Appropriations for CSR, Innovative Programs, and SDFSC have declined collectively by almost 60 percent over the past six years, or since NCLB was enacted. Continued reductions in funding for these three programs are expected. Conversely, Title I,

Part A appears to have broad, bipartisan support and should see modest increases in funding annually.

### NEA's policies and positions

NEA supports increased availability and access to extended learning opportunities such as before- and after-school programs, academic enrichment, mentoring, tutoring, and programs that extend the school year or school day for students in need of such services. The Association also supports community service programs for adolescents. NEA believes that to ensure the success of extended learning programs, local affiliates should participate in the design, authorization, implementation, and evaluation of all such programs.<sup>14</sup>

### References

<sup>1</sup> The Regional Education Laboratory for the Southeast (SERVE). Making the Most of Out-of-School Time Through Expanded Learning Opportunities. The Vision Magazine, Volume 3, Number 1. (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Extended Learning Opportunities: A Policy Statement of the Chief State School Officers, 2006. [www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/PolicyStatementOnExtendedLearningOpportunities.pdf](http://www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/PolicyStatementOnExtendedLearningOpportunities.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Regional Education Laboratory for the Southeast (SERVE). Making the Most of Out-of-School Time Through

Expanded Learning Opportunities. The Vision Magazine, Volume 3, Number 1. (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Durlak, J.A., & Weissberg, R.P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Chicago, IL. Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. [www.casel.org/downloads/ASP-Full.pdf](http://www.casel.org/downloads/ASP-Full.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Afterschool and Service Learning: Issue Brief. Afterschool Alliance. [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

<sup>7</sup> *Supporting Student Success: A Governor's Guide to Extra Learning Opportunities*, [www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0509GOVGUIDEELLO.PDF](http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0509GOVGUIDEELLO.PDF).

<sup>8</sup> Huang, D., Kim, K. S., Marshall, A., & Pérez, P. (2005). *Keeping kids in school: An LA's BEST example*. University of California, Los Angeles, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing.

<sup>9</sup> Expanding Learning Opportunities: It Takes More than Time: Issue Brief #29. The document may be retrieved from [www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue\\_briefs/issue\\_expand\\_learn.doc](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_briefs/issue_expand_learn.doc).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Using NCLB Funds to Support Extended Learning Time: Opportunities for Afterschool Programs. The Council of Chief State School Officers. August 2005.

<sup>14</sup> National Education Association Handbook 2007. Resolutions F-26, B-1, Legislative Program for the 110th Congress.

### Resources

**Resources on Afterschool** is an online tool featuring selected resources in the areas of research and evaluation, promising practices, professional development, public awareness and communications, policy, and financing of after-school programs. [www.afterschoolresources.org](http://www.afterschoolresources.org)

**The Afterschool Alliance** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of after-school programs and advocates for quality, affordable programs for all children. [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

**Afterschool Investments** provides state profiles developed by the Afterschool Investments project. The Web site provides data and descriptions of the after-school landscape, which includes a range of out-of-school time programming that can occur before and after school, on weekends, and during summer months. [www.nccic.org/afterschool/statep.html](http://www.nccic.org/afterschool/statep.html)