

# ***Extended Learning Opportunities: A Summary of Evaluation Data***

*Developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers on behalf of the Chief's  
Extended Learning Opportunities Taskforce*

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## **Defining Extended Learning Opportunities**

Extended learning opportunities (ELO) occur during the hours that school-age children are not in school. ELO takes place before and after school, on weekends, and during the summer months. Extended learning programs vary significantly in goals and content but typically offer a range of programming including: academic enrichment and acceleration; remediation; individualized tutoring; recreation, mentoring, sports, and extracurricular activities.

## **Evaluation Data from Selected Afterschool Programs**

Although extended learning programs have been operating for many years in most communities, recent years have seen a surge in demand and availability of afterschool programs. Substantial federal financial support, primarily through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, has played a part in expanding the availability of extended learning opportunities. Private foundations have also devoted significant funds focused on increasing access and fostering program quality. Additionally, many states and local districts have taken the initiative to establish and fund a wide variety of after-school opportunities for elementary, middle, and high school youth as a means of providing a safe haven for young people, improving academic achievement, improving student behavior, and reducing risk-taking behaviors. As the public funding toward extended learning programs has increased so has the need for accountability. Hard data on how afterschool programs improve student achievement is much needed and this body of research is rapidly growing. Described below are key findings and specific examples from evaluation data on afterschool programs.<sup>1</sup>

### **Afterschool programs positively impact student achievement in reading and math as measured by standardized test scores.**

- Fourth grade students' scores in the Ohio Urban School Initiative School Age Child Care Project (SACC) exceeded the statewide percentages of students meeting proficiency standards in every subject area tested: writing, reading,

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<sup>1</sup> This data is excerpted from the *Afterschool Alliance Backgrounder: Formal Evaluations of the Academic Impact of Afterschool Programs* found at: [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Evaluations\\_Academic\\_0904.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Evaluations_Academic_0904.pdf).

mathematics, citizenship, and science. SACC 6th graders exceeded the statewide percentages of students meeting proficiency standards in four of the five areas: writing, reading, mathematics, and citizenship." according to an evaluation by the University of Cincinnati's Evaluation Services Center.

- An evaluation of North Carolina's 'Support Our Students' 2001-2002 programs, conducted by EDSTAR, an independent research and analysis firm, found that, "At every grade except sixth grade, improvements in SOS participants' mean EOG [End of Grade Achievement Test] reading scale scores exceeded the state's improvement goals." Also, "The percentages of students who scored at grade level proficiency increased in both reading and math, with the greatest increase in reading—from 67 percent at grade level to 71 percent."
- Reading scores for San Diego's "6 to 6" students improved, according to evaluator WestEd. Fifty-seven percent of students increased their SAT-9 reading scores over the course of the studied year. Nearly ten percent of children moved up into the 25th percentile or higher in 2000 by comparison to 1999 reading scores on the SAT-9.
- Policy Studies Associates' second-year evaluation of The After-School Corporation's (TASC's) program showed academic gains in reading on assessment tests administered in grades 3-8. "Among those scoring at the lowest proficiency level in 1998-99, 45 percent of active participants improved their scores in 1999-2000 enough to move to a higher performance level, and 3 percent scored at grade level." The report also found significant differences in proficiency-level shifts among active participants and non-participants who scored in the lowest proficiency level on the 1998-99 mathematics tests. In math, 31 percent of active participants scoring at the lowest proficiency level in 1998-99 scored at a higher proficiency level in 1999-2000, compared to 23 percent of non-participants who demonstrated the same improvement.
- A statewide evaluation of California's After School Education and Safety Program (formerly the After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnerships Program, ASLSNPP) by the University of California at Irvine demonstrated mathematics gains closely related to individual students' level of participation in the program: "Among students who participated for more than 50 days (approximately 7.5 months), there was an increase of 4.9 percent in students above the 25th percentile, an increase considerably larger than that found statewide. *The scores suggest that, particularly for students who participate in the ASLSNPP for substantial periods of time, there is a closing of the gap in math achievement between low-income and other students.*" [Emphasis in original.]
- In early 2003, the Massachusetts Department of Education released an evaluation the state's After-School and Other Out-of-School Time Grant Programs. According to the report, FY 2002 results indicate that 56 percent of the students participating had positive gains on measured outcomes. "Student gains in math and/or English Language Arts were statistically significant in 73 percent of the ASOST programs."

### **Afterschool programs positively impact student attendance during the regular school day**

- Evaluations of LA's BEST by the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation show that students' regular school-day attendance improved once they began participating in the afterschool program. "Absence follow-up data for the fifth-grade cohort (1994-1995) showed that students who participated in LA's BEST had significantly fewer absences in Grades 6 and 7." This improved attendance correlated to higher academic achievement on standardized tests of math, reading and language arts.
- The Harvard Family Research Project evaluation of the ASLSNPP program in California found that, "regular school day attendance of students in the program increased between 1999 and 2000. Among the ASLSNPP participants who were absent 5 percent or more days in 1999, the average increase in attendance was 5.6 days. Among those who were absent 10 percent or more days in 1999, the average increase in attendance was 11 days. For those absent 15 or more days, the average increase in attendance was 17 days."
- According to a study of Boys and Girls Clubs "Project Learn" (BGC), "Program youth missed an average of only 2.19 days of school a year at the 30-month measurement as compared to missing an average of 6.4 days a year at baseline." In contrast, BGC comparison youth went from missing an average of 4.85 days of school in the baseline year to missing an average of 12.33 days a year at the 30-month follow-up.

### **Summer learning programs have the added benefit of offsetting summer learning loss (the tendency of students to regress academically over the summer months).**

- A meta-analysis conducted by Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, and Muhlenbruck (2000) found that summer programs that intentionally focus on "lessening or removing learning deficiencies" positively impact the knowledge and skill acquisition of students who participate.
- A recent study conducted by Jimmy S. Kim found that having students read four or five books during the summer months can prevent or offset summer learning loss. Kim found that students, regardless of race, socioeconomic background, or previous levels of achievement, who read more over the summer received higher reading comprehension scores in subsequent achievement tests than those children who read one or no books.

**Afterschool programs positively impact the lowest performing students at greater rates than other students in after school programs.**

- An evaluation of North Carolina's 'Support Our Students' 2001-2002 programs, conducted by EDSTAR, found that, with the exception of sixth graders, participants who were the furthest behind and had the most risk factors (e.g., free/reduced lunch status, single-parent households, etc.) made the greatest gains on EOG. (Evaluators surmised that sixth graders often had problems making the transition to middle school, and recommended that sixth-grade transition programs be implemented.)
- Policy Studies Associates' study of TASC's third year of operation concluded that, "the TASC participants who were at greatest academic risk made the largest math gains, when compared to other students. Math benefits were clearly evident for students who scored in the lowest of four proficiency levels in the year prior to TASC participation. The gains for these low-achieving students were evident for active participants regardless of their number of years of participation. Among students from low-income families, the evaluation also found evidence of after-school benefits in math after two or more years of active participation."
- An evaluation by the Department of Education, University of California at Irvine and Research Support Services, found that reading and mathematics gains of students in Los Angeles' YS-CARE program (which serves children from families that receive TANF) outpaced those of non-participating students, as measured by SAT-9 scores.

**Students benefit the most from regular and prolonged attendance at afterschool programs.**

- Policy Studies Associates' study of TASC's third year of operation concluded: "Students who participated in TASC after-school activities the most consistently and for the longest period of time experienced the greatest math gains, when compared to similar non-participants. Among students who participated actively in TASC projects in each year of their enrollment, students participating for two years gained an average of four scale-score points more on the city-wide standardized tests than similar non-participants. Demonstrating the value of even higher levels of participation, students classified as 'highly active' (participating 80 percent or more of the days they were enrolled in the year and at least 80 days) gained six scale-score points more than similar non-participants after only two years of TASC participation."
- EDSTAR's evaluation of North Carolina's 'Support Our Students' 2001-2002 programs found that classroom teachers reported that more than 40 percent of the regularly attending participants improved their grade in English and/or math.

- A five-site evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs' national Project Learn program, found that "As program involvement increased, engagement in reading, use of verbal skills, writing, tutoring, and the study of geography all significantly ( $p < .05$ ) increased as well." Further, "[t]here was also a direct and statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) relationship between program involvement and enjoyment of reading, use of verbal skills, writing, and geography." In addition, program youth increased their average grades by 11 percent from baseline to the 30-month measurement while BGC comparison youth and non-BGC comparison youth, over the same period, increased their average grades by .4 percent and .3 percent, respectively."

### **Afterschool Evaluations – Recommendations for State Policy and Practice**

The following policy recommendations underscore the critical role that state education agencies and local schools play in developing and sustaining high-quality, effective extended learning programs. In addition to funding programs, best practices and policies are required at both levels in order to ensure that programs are self-sustaining and produce positive academic outcomes for students. Recent evaluations suggest that states should consider the following policy recommendations when implementing new or administering existing extended learning initiatives<sup>2</sup>:

#### **Articulate extended learning opportunities as an explicit part of a broader school reform and improvement agenda**

- Embed ELO as part of the state system of support to low-performing schools
- Articulate ELO as an explicit strategy that districts/schools can implement if in "needs improvement" status
- Create policies which ensure that ELO programs are integrally linked to the school day/year (e.g. location, staffing, program content, goals, etc.)
- Articulate ELO as a state/local strategy for closing the achievement gap

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<sup>2</sup> These recommendations are compiled from several reports: *The Study of Promising After-School Programs: Descriptive Report of the Promising Programs*. (2004). Vandell, Reisner et al.. *After-school programs: Evaluations and Outcomes* (2003). SERVE. *Extending Learning Time for Disadvantaged Student. Volume 1: Summary of Promising Practices and Volume 2: Profiles of Promising Practices*. 1995. U.S. Department of Education.

**Effectively embed ELO initiatives within state education agencies to support alignment, avoid duplication of efforts and maximize supports to high-poverty, low-performing schools**

- Review SEA policy and procedures to ensure that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC, Title I, and SES staff can effectively collaborate across programs
- Consider reorganizing SEA so that CCLC, Title I and SES and other student support programs are housed in the same division/department
- Ensure that a system is in place to share information across programs and divisions
- Ensure that data collection processes meet the needs of all student support programs

**Develop standards to set high expectations for all programs**

- Standards should be set high to foster continuous improvement
- Standards should be aligned to general education goals (SEA vision for all students)
- Standards should be articulated as a key part of a larger *system* focused on program quality (e.g. also includes professional development, training, technical assistance, evaluation, etc.)
- Standards should cover a core set of issues related to afterschool programming; program management/administration, program content, relationships between students/staff/parents, physical environment, safety/health/nutrition
- Standards should be comprehensive but broad enough to be relevant to the widest range of programs
- Policies should ensure that program leadership are knowledgeable of program standards and are able to operationalize them within the program setting

**Support diverse programming that includes a range of activities and opportunities for student choice**

- Positive evaluation data included in this synthesis are primarily from multi-faceted, comprehensive programs that offer diverse programming (e.g. homework help, tutoring, academic enrichment, physical education, recreation, etc.)
- Curriculum and activities should be fun, experiential and hands-on to keep students engaged and learning
- State policies should ensure that instructional strategies differ from the regular school day, even if school day teachers staff the program

- Program content should be an appropriate balance between students needs (e.g. homework help, academic support) and wants (games, computer club, etc.)
- Staffing policies should be aligned with skills, abilities, and competencies needed to effectively deliver program components

**Encourage regular and prolonged student participation in programs because evaluations show the greatest gains for students that participated more often and for two or more years**

- Create recruitment and retention strategies as part of the program planning process
- Data gathering requirements should allow for levels of participation to be analyzed for evaluation purposes
- States should consider supporting mandatory attendance policies *where this is feasible and appropriate*
- States should encourage districts to establish attendance policy guidelines
- State policy might also support the use of incentives to encourage student attendance and participation

**Create and/or sustain a system of professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) for afterschool program staff**

- PD/TA should be aligned to program standards, goals and expected outcomes
- PD/TA should be job embedded and specifically related to core competencies, skills and abilities expected of afterschool staff
- Consider partnering with other organizations and agencies to increase state capacity to effectively provide technical assistance to programs/professional development opportunities
- PD/TA should be offered at regular intervals
- Program evaluation data should drive PD/TA content (areas where program is weak/needs improvement are included into content of PD/TA)

**Develop a strong monitoring and evaluation system to document outcomes and foster continuous improvement**

- Data collection should be standardized across all programs
- Data should be disaggregated by subgroups (i.e. attendance level, age, and grade level)
- Data collected should be based on program standards, goals and expected outcomes

- Evaluation data should be used to refine state-level policy, support professional development for program staff, and technical assistance efforts to drive program improvement
- Training on data collection should be made available to program leadership

### **Clearly articulate long-term v. short-term academic program outcomes**

- Research suggests that it is not always reasonable to expect an *immediate impact* on test scores, especially considering the duration, intensity of programs relative to the school day/year. However, states might expect to see short-term impact on homework completion rates, attendance (both program and school day), in-class grades, and school connectedness; factors which some researchers propose as intermediary outcomes that lead to long-term outcomes (i.e. increases in test scores).
- States should invest in program evaluation based on a realistic theory of program impact that is research-based
- Consider the existing research base when articulating program goals as part of state policy
- Align program goals with activities *and* expected long/short-term outcomes
- Collect program data based on long and short-term expected outcomes
- Incorporate short and long-term indicators into program evaluations

### **Target state funds**

- Prioritize funding for participants based on school improvement status, Title I eligibility, concentrations of poverty. If lack of available funds is an issue - funding for afterschool programs should *first* be made available to academically at-risk students attending schools that are not meeting state standards/adequate yearly progress.

### **Secure sustainable funds**

- States should also articulate ELO as an opportunity that should be available to all that want/need it and work to secure funds (existing or new) to make this happen (e.g. ELO becomes embedded within mainstream education, a key support to enable all children to succeed in school, work and life);
- Consider supporting the creation of dedicated line item for state-administered extended learning programs
- Consider tapping existing federal and state funding streams to support extended learning initiatives (e.g. Safe and Drug Free Schools, Title I, Title V – Innovative Programs)

## **Partner with other state agencies and organizations to expand the availability and quality of extended learning opportunities**

- Consider formally partnering with state childcare, juvenile justice, and social service agencies to increase state capacity, expand programming, avoid duplication of efforts, and align programming (particularly in instances where the same student population is being served)
- Align multiple program goals to potential funding sources across agencies/organizations (e.g. academic support/enrichment, prevention, safety)
- Create time and space for collaborative planning
- Implement shared planning, administration and accountability processes

The recommendations above are *a work in progress* and reflect the Council staffs' present thinking about the potential leadership role that states can exercise related to ELO. From our perspective, SEA leadership related to supporting and strengthening extended learning opportunities is critical because:

- State education agencies have primary responsibility for ensuring that all students in their state have access to a high-quality system of education; ELO should be envisioned as a vital part of this system
- State education agencies have responsibility for developing and strengthening state systems of support for low-performing schools and districts; ELO should be considered one the supports for children attending low-performing schools
- State education agencies administer the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC and SES programs; two federal initiatives that take place during non-school hours; states should consider themselves leaders in the effective implementation of these programs
- State education agencies are at the forefront of national conversations about critical skills that all students need to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; ELO should be considered part of the delivery system for those skills
- State education agencies are increasingly focused on raising the achievement level of all students while closing the persistent achievement gap; ELO is one strategy (embedded in a comprehensive approach) to make this happen
- Many state education agencies have also implemented extended learning opportunities in recent years; lessons learned from these initiatives are important to document and share with other SEAs and relevant stakeholders

The recommendations and ideas expressed as part of this document will help to inform the Council's work related to revising the Policy Statement; a core responsibility of the ad-hoc ELO Taskforce.

## **Key Research Reports Linking Academic Outcomes and Out-of-School Time**

**Afterschool Alliance Backgrounder: Formal Evaluations of the Academic Impact of Afterschool Programs.** (2004). This paper summarizes the data from 17 evaluations of extended learning programs. Programs included in this analysis include LA's Best, TASC, Boys and Girls Club Project Learn, Houston's Afterschool Achievement program and San Diego's 6 to 6. Additionally, the afterschool alliance has compiled a summary of evaluations of afterschool programs' impact on behavior, safety and family life. [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue\\_br.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_br.cfm)

**Summer Learning Opportunities in High-Poverty Schools.** (2005). CCSSO. This publication describes five summer learning programs, based in high-poverty schools, that have contributed to improved student achievement. The profiles examine program goals, structure and content, professional development, funding and sustainability, student outcomes, challenges to implementation, and successes. The report also synthesizes best practices in implementing summer learning opportunities. <http://www.ccsso.org/content/PDFs/Summer%20Learning.pdf>

**The Study of Promising After-School Programs: Descriptive Report of the Promising Programs.** (2004). Vandell, Reisner et al. This report analyzed promising practices in afterschool programs. Focusing on in-school and school-linked programs, the researchers have identified a number of program processes, content factors, and structural and institutional supports that were common to high quality programs. <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/childcare/statements3.html>

**The Effectiveness of Out-of-School Time Strategies in Assisting Low-achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics: A Research Synthesis.** (2003). Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). McREL research has shown positive academic gains for low-achieving or at-risk youth in afterschool programs. This Meta-analysis of 53 evaluations of out-of-school time programs demonstrates that afterschool programs can improve student achievement in reading and math particularly for at-risk and underachieving students. [http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Noteworthy/5042IR\\_NW\\_OSTPrograms.pdf](http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/Noteworthy/5042IR_NW_OSTPrograms.pdf)

**After-school programs: Evaluations and Outcomes** (2003). SERVE. This is a synthesis of evaluations and research on after-school programs. This report looks at what impact the programs have on student outcomes, the methods used to study these programs and recommendations for improving data collection. [http://www.serve.org/\\_downloads/REL/ELO/AfterSchool.pdf](http://www.serve.org/_downloads/REL/ELO/AfterSchool.pdf)

**Summer Learning Loss: The Problem and Some Solutions** (2003). Cooper, Harris. This edition of ERIC Digest examines the problem of summer learning loss and offers suggestions for addressing the problem. Meta-analyses are cited, which found that summer learning loss equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade level equivalents on standardized test scores, that summer loss was more pronounced for math facts and spelling--both factual/procedural rather

than conceptual learning; and that individual differences among students may also play a role. The Digest details three approaches to preventing summer learning loss: extended school year, summer school, and a modified calendar that replaces the long summer break with shorter cycles of attendance and breaks.

[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?\\_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=Summer+Learning+Loss&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=eric\\_metadata&\\_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b801b5b73](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=Summer+Learning+Loss&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=eric_metadata&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900000b801b5b73)

### **Promoting Learning and School Attendance Through After-School Programs Student-Level Changes in Educational Performance Across TASC's First Three Years** (2002). Policy Studies Associates. The findings

presented here paint a positive picture of the benefits of TASC participation for grades K-8, especially frequent, regular participation that extends for two years or more. Four findings emerge most clearly: first, after-school attendance rates are improving; second, across grade levels and types of students, TASC projects are promoting improved achievement in math; third, students at greatest academic risk appear to derive the greatest benefit from regular TASC participation and, fourth, TASC project participation is associated with significant gains in school attendance.

<http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/TASC%20Year%203%20Student%20Outcomes%20Report.pdf>

### **Challenges and Opportunities in After-School Programs: Lessons for Policymakers and Funders.** (2001). Private/Public Ventures. This brief report

utilizes findings from a multi-year evaluation of the Extended Service Schools (ESS) Adaptation Initiative to discuss three key challenges that have emerged in the expansion of afterschool programs; program access to space, particularly in school buildings, transportation to and from programs, and providing services to those most in need. <http://www.ppv.org/indexfiles/pubsindex.html>

### **Building Quality and Supporting Expansion of After-school Projects: Summary of Findings.** (2001). Policy Studies Associates, Inc. This report

summarizes the evaluation of The After-School Corporation (TASC) program's second year. The report details the program's efforts to promote quality by focusing on student retention, recruiting and retaining qualified staff, establishing positive relationships with schools and communities, and using available resources to improve program operations and quality.

[http://www.tascorp.org/pages/promising\\_es2.pdf](http://www.tascorp.org/pages/promising_es2.pdf)

### **A Decade of Results: The Impact of LA's Best After-School Enrichment Program on Subsequent Student Achievement and Performance.** (2000).

The UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) Graduate School of Education and Information Studies conducted an independent longitudinal evaluation of the impact of LA's Best Program on student achievement, attendance rates and English proficiency levels and found significant increases in student achievement for program participants when compared to non-participants.

<http://www.lasbest.org/learn/eval.html>