

Texas Expanded Learning Opportunities Council

BIENNIAL REPORT TO THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE ON
EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN TEXAS
NOVEMBER 2016

The Texas Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Councilⁱ recognizes that there is a critically important relationship between participation in high-quality ELO and positive academic and youth development outcomes. In many communities, expanded learning programs are the primary resource used by communities to fully support their students' progress in meeting and exceeding the state's academic requirements, preparing for careers, and increasing academic performance, not only for students who are most in need, but also for entire campuses and communities.

High-quality affordable ELO is an important strategy districts can employ for struggling students and campuses, but it also provides students and families with the prevention-oriented supports necessary for students to thrive and for parents to maintain regular work schedules and gain practical skills to help their students.

“Schools are hubs for kids living in poverty. Kids love being at the school at the end of the school day because it’s a safe and healthy environment.”

– Dr. Kurt Hulett, Middle School Principal

High-Quality ELO Programs Improve Student Outcomes, Help Families, and Support the Texas Workforce

State-funded ELO programs would have a positive impact on academic outcomes for Texas school districts, individual campuses, families, students, and communities.

Research shows that Texans support high-quality afterschool and summer programs that keep students safe, inspire learning, and help working parents (Afterschool Alliance, 2014).

- ELO programs reduce absences and decrease dropout rates (Chang, H. and Jordan, P., 2014; Auger A., et al., 2013).
- Consistent participation in ELO programs narrows and can eliminate the gap in math achievement (Pierce, K., Auger, A. and Vandell, D., 2013).
- ELO programs that are intentionally designed to relate directly to the school day curriculum increase retention of academic material (Becket, M., et al., 2009).
- Community health outcomes are improved through reducing education disparities, and academic gains are made when we invest in programs that increase student health and fitness (Wilson, K., 2016).
- In Texas, academically-focused interventions in existing afterschool programs have positive impacts on participants when coupled with academic enrichment (Devaney, E., et al., 2016).

Texas Students Need More Access to Expanded Learning Opportunities

The ELO Council found that high-quality affordable ELO programs are unavailable for tens of thousands of Texas students, especially those in rural and high poverty areas.

Although many school districts and privately funded partners are able to support some ELO-type programs, very few have sufficient resources to sustain consistent high-quality affordable ELO options. Texas has one dedicated federal funding source for high-quality ELO – the federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program. This is a very large program, serving a respectable number of 145,000 students during the 2015-16 school year. However, this number represents only 2.8% of all public school students and 4.7% of the more than *three* million economically disadvantaged students enrolled in public schools (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

While the federal 21st CCLC program serves students in communities across the state, funding levels cannot meet demand. In some instances, community organizations have stepped in to help, but the demand outpaces available resources. Over the past ten years, public school enrollment increased by 18.9 percent while enrollment of economically disadvantaged students – a major driver in the need for programs – increased by 28.2 percent (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

To fill this gap, the ELO Council recommends that, with support from the Texas Legislature, state funding be dedicated for high-quality affordable ELO demonstration programs designed to increase academic performance. Competitively-funded need-based programs would focus resources on programs that increase grade advancement, post-secondary academic readiness, and align with high school graduation program endorsements and post-secondary career readiness. A crucial state investment of \$7 per day per student, along with required local investment and partnerships, can provide the resources needed to meet the specific needs of Texas communities that cannot start ELO programs on their own. More detail on how proposed demonstration grants can improve access to high-quality affordable programs is outlined in on pages 5 and 6.

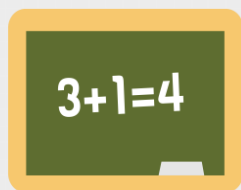
ELO Programs Help Maintain Texas’ Investments in Prekindergarten, Pathways, and Prevention

The importance of high-quality affordable ELO is garnering attention in Texas as a viable and sustainable foundation for: (1) supporting significant state and local investments in our youngest students by continuing to provide safe and academically enriching environments; (2) exposing students to graduation, college, and career pathways with meaningful hands-on activities; and (3) preventing lower academic outcomes before they occur.

“The 84th Texas Legislature made a large investment in prekindergarten school readiness through the passage of House Bill 4. Unless we continue to invest in students as they enter elementary school, we stand to lose the value of the important pre-K programs that serve them.”

- Terry Conner, Haynes & Boone, LLP

Expanded Learning Lays the Foundation for Student Success



Pre-K

Leverage the state investment by providing afterschool and summer programs for school age youth



Pathways

Support schools, families, and students in exposing students to career pathways so they can make informed decisions about their futures



Prevention

Provide pro-active prevention to at risk students to help them stay on track and make gains that outpace baseline expectations

High-quality affordable ELO programs protect our investment in the youngest Texans.

Through the passage of House Bill 4 in 2015, the Texas Legislature recognized the importance of increasing access to high-quality affordable education programs for prekindergarten students. As these students progress through elementary school, it is just as important to protect that investment and maintain our commitment to early education. State-funded ELO programs can provide our youngest Texans with high-quality engagement in elementary learning programs that keeps them safe, supports working families, increases school day attendance, decreases the achievement gap, and helps students retain material they learned in the regular classroom setting (Chang, H. and Jordan, P., 2014 and Becket, M., et al., 2009).

High-quality affordable ELO programs provide students with hands-on exploration of career pathways. Early experiences with endorsement options and graduation requirements help students and families make the most informed decisions and build confidence as they begin to pursue pathways as early as 4th and 5th grade. In high-quality ELO, trained professional staff use approaches such as service learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and discovery-oriented approaches that directly relate student experiences to school curriculum. Partnerships with area employers can help students learn about real-world careers in a hands-on way. ELO can also provide schools with more time for academic tasks and relevant support for students.

High-quality affordable ELO programs provide prevention-oriented supports that help students and improve low-performing schools. Communities benefit the most from programs that help support active learning and positive youth development. High-quality ELO programs not only keep students excited about learning and allow students time to experience school day curriculum in a different way, but also prevent students from falling behind in school. ELO programs support working parents and area employers; the most affordable programs benefit the lowest income and most rural settings, by helping parents maintain regular work schedules and learn how to support their students in academics.

“Kids are learning all the time. Having fun is merely the delivery format.”

– Susan Baskin, Owner and CEO, Camp Champions

Partnerships are Essential for High-Quality Sustainable ELO Programs

The ELO Council recommends strong locally-based partnerships that build and deliver high-quality and sustainable programs. ELO works best with strong partnerships among school campuses, local employers, community- and faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, community volunteers, and private supporters. In the highest need communities — often the most rural and low-income areas — partnerships are the only means by which programs can continue.

Just as essential is a district’s commitment to planning and coordination of local, state, and federal resources to support consistent high-quality ELO, but doing so provides its own set of challenges. Federal funding sources such as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education and the Every Student Succeeds Act, Title I, Part A can help to support ELO, but these funds have historically been used for in-school time activities and there can be competing demands for limited funding. Many districts are left with too few state and local resources to provide consistent, high-quality ELO programs.

State Standards for High-Quality ELO Programs Make Programs Better

Research shows that the quality of ELO programming makes a difference in achieving outcomes. Since the 83rd Texas Legislature created the ELO Council in 2013, the Texas Partnership for Out of School Time published the [Texas Standards of High-quality Afterschool, Summer and Expanded Learning](#) and an accompanying assessment tool. The standards and tool serve to guide ELO programs toward high-quality elements that increase the likelihood of success and sustainability. Components include the following:

- Learning activities that are intentionally designed and relate to school curriculum
- Engaging, age-appropriate activities
- Dedication to ongoing staff development, support, and resources
- Commitment to engaging families and community partners
- Focus on organizational practices that ensure sustainability (Travis, R., 2014)

“We are going to have to make an investment in more time for kids in quality programs to have the caliber of workforce we need.”

– Mark Kiester, Chief Professional Officer
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Austin Area

Recommendations for High-Quality Affordable ELO in Texas

The ELO Council has identified several opportunities for the 85th Texas Legislature and the Texas Education Agency to increase access to high-quality affordable ELO programs for students who are most in need. A shorter summary is in the Table of Recommendations on the following pages. Although some of these recommendations may require funding, most are of minimal or no cost to the state.

Contribute to State Accountability Ratings: As Texas develops its plan for the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it has a unique opportunity to specify that high-quality affordable ELO programs are a viable strategy in the state’s accountability system that will improve student, campus, and district performance. Research clearly shows that ELO programs are a proven option and a wise investment in our youngest Texans and future workforce. Specifically, the ELO Council recommends that TEA do the following:

- Provide accountability system credit for districts that partner using high-quality ELO with community-based organizations, businesses, and higher education to prepare students as part of “Domain IV: Postsecondary Readiness.”
- Include high-quality ELO programs in the state’s accountability rating system as one or more indicators in what is currently “Domain V: Community & Student Engagement.”
- Include high-quality ELO programs in the state’s accountability rating system and prioritize high-quality affordable ELO under Title IV, Part A formula grant programs that will begin in 2017-2018.

Fund Sustainable Competitive Demonstration Programs: The ELO Council recommends that the Texas Legislature fund a competitive grant opportunity for districts to demonstrate how high-quality affordable ELO programs produce positive outcomes for Texas students that are most in need, especially those in grades 3-5 and 6-8. Grant programs would focus on grade advancement, increasing post-secondary academic readiness, and exploring endorsement and career options and include the following components:

- Competitive funding and statewide resources for supplemental, high-quality affordable ELO programs to increase local access and promote high-quality program development statewide. Programs will focus on realizing and continuing the benefits of investment in high-quality pre-K, strengthening pathways to graduation, and preventing academic failure before it begins.
- A portion of funds from the grant program could provide competitive yet flexible supplemental dollars to address local needs that “fill the gaps” in providing full-service, high-quality ELO, including late-summer school year preparation programs, and allow expenditures on targeted needs such as transportation, targeted enrichment, and preventative interventions so that students can learn and families can work.
- Sustainability and community partnerships are essential for long-term success. To that end, programs must contribute flexible matching funds through private funding, dedicated expenditures, sliding scale fees, and/or in-kind contributions.

The proposed competitive grant program is fully scalable with a per student cost of \$7 per student per day plus administration and program evaluation. For example, for \$105,000 – 70% in state contributions and 30% in local match – a demonstration site would serve a minimum of 75 students for 200 days, including summer. Local match would allow in-kind and cash

contributions. Using this rate, \$5 million plus a local match of at least \$2,140,000 would serve approximately 5,100 students annually; \$10 million plus a local match of at least \$4,280,000 would serve approximately 10,200 students annually; \$25 million plus a local match of at least \$10,700,000 would serve approximately 25,500 students annually.

Education, Higher Education and Workforce Partnerships: The ELO Council recommends state-level partnerships continue among the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission to encourage higher education and workforce partners at the local level to work with ELO programs to meet the needs of local communities. By allowing education partners to receive credit in the higher education rating system and allowing workforce partners to receive tax credits, local programs will have more access to the partnerships that are essential for success. Formal professional networks can work on behalf of these partnerships to increase access to high-quality programs; promote engaging ELO approaches such as service learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning; and implement successful partnership models. Specific recommendations are as follows:

- Allow institutions of higher education, particularly community and technical colleges, to receive higher education rating system credit for engaging in partnerships with high-quality affordable ELO programs that prepare students for college and career.
- Create a tax credit to encourage public-private partnerships that support ELO in Texas schools to align with the governor's Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative promoting workforce development, affordable post-secondary education, and career awareness (Texas Office of the Governor, 2016).

Strengthen Existing Networks and Programs: The ELO council requests that TEA create a state-level recognition program that highlights high-quality affordable ELO programs that model best practices and demonstrate critical improvement outcomes, thereby encouraging innovation, coordination, and exceptional outcomes. In addition, the state should support developing and sustaining a network of Texas ELO professionals that will increase access to high-quality programs for students and families who are the most in need; apply engaging ELO approaches such as service learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning; and implement successful partnership models.

Implement State Standards for High-Quality ELO: Program standards based on best practices are essential for implementing high-quality ELO and achieving real outcomes. Standards address areas such as safety, nutrition, interactions, programming, diversity, family engagement, community partnerships, school partnerships, staff development, evaluation, and sustainability. State-funded programs and programs that receive credit through TEA or higher education accountability systems should adhere to one set of TEA-approved standards that align with TXPOST standards and Texas 21st CCLC requirements.

Increase Awareness: Finally, the ELO Council would like to recognize the importance of continuing the discussions around policies that encourage high-quality ELO programs. Sharing information among stakeholders, programs, parents, and policymakers is necessary in order to raise awareness about the important role that ELO programs play in our communities. Continuing the ELO Council translates to increasing the quality and affordability of programs offered to students, increasing the access that is critical for students who otherwise would not participate in programs, and ultimately increasing performance on student, campus, district and statewide academic indicators.

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS: HIGH-QUALITY AFFORDABLE ELO IN TEXAS

Contribute to State Accountability Ratings: Research clearly shows that ELO programs are a proven option and a wise investment in our youngest Texans and future workforce. The Council recommends that TEA include high-quality ELO programs in the state's accountability rating system and prioritize high-quality affordable ELO under Title IV, Part A formula grant programs that will begin in 2017-2018.

Fund Sustainable Competitive Demonstration Programs: The ELO Council recommends that the Texas Legislature fund a competitive grant opportunity for districts to demonstrate how high-quality affordable ELO programs produce positive outcomes for Texas students that are most in need.

The competitive grant program is fully scalable with a per student cost of \$7 per student per day plus state-level administration. For example, for \$105,000 – 70% in state contributions and 30% in local match – a demonstration site would serve a minimum of 75 students for 200 days, including summer. Local match would allow in-kind and cash contributions. Using this rate, \$5 million plus a local match of at least \$2,140,000 would serve approximately 5,100 students annually; \$10 million plus a local match of at least \$4,280,000 would serve approximately 10,200 students annually; \$25 million plus a local match of at least \$10,700,000 would serve approximately 25,500 students annually

Encourage Higher Education Partnerships: Allow institutions of higher education, particularly community and technical colleges, to receive credit under the higher education rating system for engaging in partnerships with high-quality affordable ELO programs that prepare students for college and career.

Support Workforce Partners: Create a tax credit to encourage public-private partnerships that support ELO in Texas schools to align with the governor's Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative promoting workforce development, affordable post-secondary education, and career awareness (Texas Office of the Governor, 2016).

Implement State Standards for High-Quality ELO: State-funded programs and programs that receive credit through TEA or higher education accountability systems should adhere to one set of TEA-approved standards that align with TXPOST standards and Texas 21st CCLC requirements.

Recognize Outstanding Programs: Create a recognition program to highlight high-quality affordable ELO programs that model best practices and demonstrate critical improvement outcomes, thereby encouraging the funding of innovation, coordination, and exceptional outcomes.

Develop Resources for Underserved Communities: Develop a network of Texas ELO professionals to increase access to high-quality programs for students and families who are the most in need; apply engaging ELO approaches such as service learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning; and implement successful partnership models.

Raise Awareness about the Importance and Impact of High-Quality Affordable ELO: Maintain the ELO Council to continue the study and state-level guidance around the important impact of high-quality ELO programs on students, families, and communities across the state. The council is an essential venue for building statewide awareness about the large gap in access to programs and developing important policy recommendations about how to create and scale high-quality affordable programs that work for Texas communities.

Thank you to the 2016 Expanded Learning Opportunities Council members for dedicating their time and expertise to this work.



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ⁱ Senate Bill 503, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2013, created the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Council to study issues concerning ELO and develop a statewide plan with recommendations for ELO programs for public school students in Texas. Texas Education Code, Chapter 22, Subsection 1, Subchapter G, defines expanded learning as opportunities provided to public school students before school, after school, during summer hours or during an extended school day, an extended school year, or a structured learning program.