



Expanded Learning Opportunities Council

Report to the 87th Texas Legislature



November 2020

Summary of Recommendations

Expanded Learning Opportunities Council
87th Texas Legislature

Topic 1: Statewide Standards for High-Quality ELO

- **Recommendation:** Form a multi-agency initiative that includes the ELO Council and legislative and executive branches to explore existing ELO standards. A coordinated effort among the executive branch, the Texas Education Agency, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission may expand access for Texas' students and families during out of school time.

Topic 2: ELO Data Collection: Coordinated Expansion

- **Recommendation 1:** Expand the state's ELO data collection to involve multi-agency coordination to identify all gaps in access across systems.
- **Recommendation 2:** For school-operated programs, include high-quality ELO programs in the extra- and co-curricular indicator.
- **Recommendation 3:** Specifically allow school-based high-quality co-curricular programs to contribute to state accountability ratings.

Topic 3: Pathways to Access for All Students

- **Recommendation 1:** Integrate ELO into TEA initiatives so students have access to additional high-quality resources and educators have access to new opportunities for economic mobility and career advancement.
- **Recommendation 2:** Integrate ELO with regular school day including program vision, staff development and ongoing professional learning, and the use of high-quality instructional materials.
- **Recommendation 3:** Continue to support ELO programs that are meeting the essential academic, developmental, and basic needs of underserved Texas students.
- **Recommendation 4:** Increase opportunities for districts to generate funds to implement more high-quality ELO.

Topic 4: ELO's Critical Role in Community Building and Crisis Response

- **Recommendation:** Incentivize and encourage districts to access ELO programs as partners to address the community needs created by the COVID crisis and to rebuild.

Purpose of This Report

The recommendations in this report are based on the continued research of the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Council members who represent communities across the state. The findings are presented to the 87th Texas Legislature for consideration to increase access of underserved populations to opportunities that help youth succeed academically and otherwise. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on the inequities that exist in access to the basic needs and academic support provided by high-quality programs that serve students during the time when school is not in session. These essential services play a critical role in the lives of Texas' students and their families when schools are open, and even more so when they are closed. More information about how ELO programs have provided essential services is included. This is the fourth biennial report of the ELO Council.

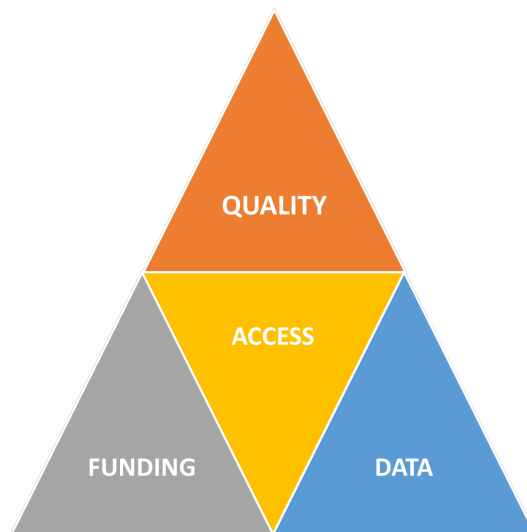
Background

The ELO Council was formed in 2013 by Senate Bill 503 (83rd Texas Legislature) and codified in the [Texas Education Code Section 33.252 Subchapter G](#). The Texas Legislature created the ELO Council to study and make legislative recommendations regarding expanded learning opportunities policy in Texas. The ELO Council has convened at least three times each year, studied the expanding field of out-of-school time opportunities, gathered testimonials from regional and local providers across the state, and led efforts in their local communities to support students and programs during the COVID-19 crisis.

The ELO Council has found that, when students have access to high-quality programs, they fare better socially, emotionally, and academically. Specifically, research has shown that when students have access to high-quality enrichment programs, they tend to:

- Attend school at higher rates
- Make better grades in math and reading
- Perform better on standardized tests
- Have fewer disciplinary incidents
- Promote to the next grade and graduate

Over the last eight years, the [ELO Council's recommendations](#) have developed to focus on the importance of increasing access to high-quality expanded learning opportunities for all students in Texas. Previous reports have posited that, for example, access to high-quality programs is inequitable for students across the state and proposed recommendations largely designed to address the observed gaps in access to high-quality ELO programs.



Recommendations

Four themes have emerged within the Council's findings:

1. Statewide Standards for High-Quality ELO Programs
2. Collaborative Data Collection
3. Pathways to Access for All Students
4. The critical role of ELO during crises

*Influencers for Increased Access to
High-Quality ELO Programs*

By adopting a statewide set of standards for high-quality programs, initiating collaborative data analysis among multiple state agencies, and developing additional pathways to funding local ELO programs, Texas can increase the quality and number of opportunities for learning and development.

1. Statewide Standards for High-Quality ELO Programs

Previous Recommendations:

- Direct the Texas Education Agency to adopt standards of quality for expanded learning programs. (2018)
- Implement TEA-approved state standards for high-quality ELO that align with Texas Partnership for Out of School Time ([TXPOST](#)) standards. (2016)

Interim Progress:

In alignment with work at TEA to implement quality standards across multiple initiatives TEA developed and implemented quality standards for the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) program, the largest dedicated funding stream for ELO in Texas. The [Texas ACE Blueprint](#) sets the standard for high-quality ELO programs in Texas.

Findings:

Standards raise the bar in program operations categories like staffing qualifications, linkages with the school day, family involvement in the student experience, health and nutrition, social development, and more. Without a shared set of quality standards, inequities in programs, especially those accessed by the most underserved students and families, will continue to exist.

While the state's 21st CCLC program represents the largest dedicated fund source for ELO programs in Texas, the ELO Council recognizes that many programs operate outside of this fund source. To ensure equitable access for all students in Texas, a set of statewide standards requires representation not only from the education sector, but also from all stakeholders that provide expanded learning opportunities across the state.

Updated Recommendation:

- Form a multi-agency initiative that includes the ELO Council and legislative and executive branches to explore existing standards. A coordinated effort among the executive branch, the Texas Education Agency, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission would expand access for Texas' students and families during out of school time.

2. ELO Data Collection: Coordinated Expansion

Previous Recommendations:

- Direct resources to support multi-agency data collection and infrastructure. (2018)
- Include high-quality ELO programs in the state's accountability rating system. (2016)

Interim Progress:

The 85th Texas Legislature required TEA to begin a collection on ELO programs operating on each school campus and the number of students served by those programs. The 86th Texas Legislature removed the requirement to collect student data and maintained the core collection. Codified in [TEC 48.009\(b\)\(3\)](#), the collection is intended to allow policymakers and funders to identify and address inequities in program access.

- TEA has completed the collection of one year of school data for fiscal year 2020. Data is currently being analyzed.
- Per [TEC 39.0533](#), TEA is studying the feasibility of incorporating an indicator that accounts for extracurricular and cocurricular student activity.

Findings:

High-quality ELO is a proven effective co-curricular resource that is essential to help students achieve academically and developmentally. When integrated with the school day program, the time outside of the regular school day is intentionally used to provide the specific supports and environments that help students thrive. By expanding the ELO data collection in alignment with a coordinated effort of stakeholders, the state will be positioned to determine where students have access to high-quality ELO across service sectors. School-based programs could be incentivized if high-quality ELO were included in the state's accountability system.

Updated Recommendations:

- Expand the state's ELO data collection to involve multi-agency coordination to identify all gaps in access across systems.
- For school-operated programs, include high-quality ELO programs in the extra- and co-curricular indicator.
- Specifically allow school-based high-quality co-curricular programs to contribute to state accountability ratings.

In partnership with [Summer of Service \(SOS\) from Home](#), Laylah V. started a nonprofit, [Deaf Ally](#), to donate clear masks to a school for deaf children. She also sells her artwork to support the nonprofit.



3. Pathways to Access for All Students

Previous Recommendations:

- Fund expanded learning programs in the most underserved areas. (2018)
- 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. Use a flexible scalable formula to meet changing demand over time. (2016)
- Dedicate funds to implement a comprehensive Texas ELO Initiative that includes a competitive grant program for high-quality ELO services. (2014)

Interim Progress:

Through House Bill 3 (86th Texas Legislature), school districts can generate dedicated funds for additional time for students to participate in ELO and for teachers to plan their work with students. Under [TEC §48.0051](#), funds are generated for this purpose at the rate of ½ day funding per school day when districts reach 181 days during a school year. The [Additional Days School Year \(ADSY\)](#) program provides three options for districts to use those funds: voluntary summer learning, intersessional programs during an extended year, and a full school-year redesign. By allowing districts additional opportunities to generate funds for ELO, schools can decide the best fit for their community and use these funds to meet their needs. TEA has partnered with the [Wallace Foundation](#) to support the creation of high-quality programs in districts using ADSY funds for summer learning programs.

Findings:

The ELO Council has found that inequities in access to high-quality programs are most prevalent among the most economically disadvantaged students and students in rural communities. Barriers to access include deficiencies in 1) affordable high-quality ELO options, 2) partnership opportunities, 3) qualified program staff and leadership and 4) access to high-quality instructional materials. It is through dedicated state funds for high-quality ELO that the most underserved populations can maintain access to high-quality programs that improve youth outcomes.

The ELO Council has found that the businesses and foundations that fund ELO programs in communities across Texas have been forced to redirect funds to COVID-19 response. As a result, the future level of support from these important partners is in question. It is imperative that the Texas Legislature consider the negative impact on underserved communities when the vital support provided by ELO programs is removed and act on providing additional ways that schools and other organizations can help support the vital role of ELO.

Investing in high-quality programs opens the field of ELO to intentionally develop economic mobility among the professionals that work with youth and families. High-quality programs provide career advancement opportunities and relevant training opportunities that advance the field of ELO and the careers of those who work in the programs. Existing educator initiatives at TEA are also relevant in ELO programs. With proper support, access to high-quality instructional materials, and high-quality standards requiring trained knowledgeable staff, ELO professionals would have access to leadership development and other resources that would advance the field of ELO and contribute to local economies statewide.

“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.”
(ELO Council, 2016)

Updated Recommendations:

- Integrate ELO into TEA initiatives so that students have access to additional high-quality resources and educators have access to new opportunities for economic mobility and career advancement. TEA can incorporate ELO into initiatives like blended learning, ADSY, bilingual summer programs, Texas Home

Learning, Lesson Study, Career and Technical Education, educator initiatives, and more.

- Integrate ELO with regular school day including program vision, staff development and ongoing professional learning, and the use of high-quality instructional materials.
- Continue to support ELO programs that are meeting the essential academic, developmental, and basic needs of underserved Texas students.
- Increase opportunities for districts to generate funds to implement more high-quality ELO.

4. ELO's Critical Role in State Re-opening Plans (New Topic of Study)

Previous Recommendations: NA

Interim Progress: NA

Findings:

Texas' ELO programs have played a critical role as an essential resource for meeting basic needs and providing supports to students, families, and schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. When programs close, students lose access to the safe supportive environments and engaging activities that help maintain their health and wellness and performance in school. Families rely on these programs to provide additional food and nutrition, prepare students for college, career, or the military, and keep students safe while parents work. Because they are essential to the families they serve, ELO programs are uniquely positioned to help provide stability when schools are not accessible, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When schools closed in March 2020, ELO programs quickly engaged to provide continuity and assess the needs of the families they serve. Harris County Department of Education, Center for Afterschool, Summer and Enrichment for Kids ([CASE for Kids](#)) [surveyed the Greater Houston area](#) to assess the impact on programs. This survey of 91 programs represented 798 sites, most of which (60%) were non-profit organizations. The results showed that many students were not able to participate in their programs because of stay at home orders, with a 78% decrease in students served. The programs were repurposed to serve students of essential workers. Even with these services, many staff were without work for the remainder of the school year.

Data has shown that despite reduced access to in-person programs, ELO programs demonstrated resiliency in meeting the

Many students were supported during the COVID-19 crisis through ELO programs. The San Antonio-based [Summer of Service \(SOS\)](#) program started SOS from Home, allowing local youth to participate in philanthropic projects and earn service hours while schools were closed. Among the success stories is Diego R. who created a collection drive resulting in a donation of over 7,000 diapers, 5,000 baby wipes, and hundreds of bottles of formula for the Texas Diaper Bank.



needs of their community by quickly pivoting from traditional models to provide continuity and support. Results of a national survey also found that while only 15% of programs were open as spring ended, almost 60% were open during the summer months; 94% of those had reduced their staff. Looking toward fall, most (79%) anticipated operating in their physical space, but only 35% were planning to serve students in person – remote instruction and hybrid programming were being offered by the majority.¹

ELO programs have been providing supports including continuous access to nutritious food, learning pods, tutoring and homework help, remote family activities, trauma informed care, community resource referrals, exercise programs, enrichment learning kits, Wi-Fi hotspots, and more.

Texas school districts recognize the value of engaging ELO programs early, regularly, and meaningfully in their plans to serve students and families to make up for inequities in learning, enrichment, connection, and resources that have been exacerbated by the COVID crisis. The COVID crisis has had a significant impact on business' and foundations' investment in funding expanded learning programs. It remains to be seen whether this impact will be long-term.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that community resources – whether schools, social services, expanded learning programs, or others – all serve the same youth and families, many of whom are facing systemic inequities. Maximizing all the assets of the educational ecosystem will better enable all our students to emerge from this crisis strong, resilient, hopeful, and better prepared for graduation, career, or military service.

Recommendation:

- Incentivize and encourage districts to access ELO programs as partners to address the community needs created by the COVID crisis and to rebuild.

Conclusion

Expanded learning opportunities provide essential services to Texas students and families as they navigate the demands of academic learning. As schools manage the spread of COVID-19, the effects of the pandemic have highlighted the critical role of ELO programs in meeting the basic needs of students and families. Programs provide daily meals and snacks and supportive relationships in addition to the critical academic and enrichment supports that students need to succeed. Programs have stepped up to ensure afterschool meals and snacks are delivered to students, students have school supplies, and that they are able to provide remote and in-person tutoring, homework help, and supplemental academic enrichment that helps keep students engaged in learning.

Now more than ever it is important to continue the work that will establish statewide standards for all ELO programs, not only in education, but also across statewide systems that serve Texas' youth. By integrating standards and data collection, the Texas Legislature can help create pathways to access for all students, especially those that otherwise would not have access, so they can succeed in academics, compete in an increasingly global marketplace, grow and develop into leaders of a strong Texas workforce and ensure that the Lone Star State remains a great place to live, work and grow.

Please contact ELOCouncil@tea.texas.gov with questions.

¹ Data are from two online surveys conducted by Edge Research on behalf of the Afterschool Alliance between May 28-June 30 and July 20-August 31, 2020. A third survey will be conducted mid-fall 2020.

A special thank you to the Expanded Learning Opportunity Council members for dedicating their expertise and time to this work.

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