

Quality Expanded Learning in Oregon

INSPIRING
STUDENT
DREAMS

SUPPORTING
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPEMNT

BUILDING
SYSTEMS &
STRUCTURES

ENGAGING
PARENTS &
FAMILIES

INCREASING
SCHOOL &
COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS

Expanded learning opportunities in Oregon, including afterschool and summer programs, play a vital role in the lives of youth by inspiring student dreams, supporting student success, and helping families and communities thrive. The OregonASK Expanded Learning Partnership works to support quality programs and to raise the profile of afterschool and summer learning in pursuit of a future where all Oregon children, youth, and families will have access to quality out-of-school time options within their communities.

A key part of OregonASK's work centers on educating policy makers and organizations using research, tools, strategies, and partnerships throughout the state. We strive to educate the community while also building awareness and supporting systematic policy, in order to increase the quality of afterschool and summer programs. This work focuses on five key components that help build quality programs: 1) Best practices to inspire learning; 2) Infrastructure that supports a sustainable system; 3) High-quality professional development for afterschool and summer program staff; 4) Parent and family engagement; and 5) School-community partnerships.

Together, these components represent a well-rounded experience that prepares students for their next steps toward college or career goals — all while instilling a community-wide commitment to every student's success. According to Valerie Strauss, a Washington Post journalist and Executive Director of Afterschool Alliance (2011), "Afterschool programs are at the cutting edge of combining education and youth development, creating programs that children want to attend — where hands-on, fun creative learning is the norm. Parents choose to send their children to these programs. Afterschool educators plan carefully to ensure the curriculum is exciting so that the students will come back."

INSPIRING STUDENT DREAMS

Expanded learning programs spark interest so that students have a greater chance to realize their full potential, attend school more often, and are more likely to graduate college or be career ready. Afterschool programs open a new world of opportunities, helping all students thrive in school and be prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. Quality afterschool programs are structured to help students learn through firsthand experiences, build skills, and connect with mentors. Young people gain hands-on experience, learn to communicate, collaborate, and lead as they explore careers, increase attendance, and improve classroom behavior and classroom learning.

BUILDING SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

Afterschool programs are shaped by community needs and are an integral part of the system that helps all students thrive in school and in life. They provide enriching opportunities, keep students safe while parents are working, help students avoid risky behaviors, and equip them with the

skills employers need. However, the decentralized and fragmented nature of the afterschool field has long been a mixed blessing. Cost and bureaucracy have been kept to a minimum, allowing afterschool programs to remain community-oriented and serve all interested children. Although, as we see a growing need to address new challenges (such as increasing the supply and strengthening the program quality), we must create greater alignment between education, workforce, industry, and government partners.

Oregon's Students Success Act and Federal ESSA implementation provide new flexibility to leverage funds more comprehensively in order to serve young people within a community. It is critically important that expanded learning be part of the system that strategically blends and braids funds to help ensure all of Oregon's students receive the support, opportunities, and access they need to develop the technical and workplace skills necessary for success. Communities who identify a shared goal for leveraging funds can enhance the number of afterschool, workforce, career, and technical education (CTE) programs as a component of expanded learning opportunities.

SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Providing professional development is essential to enhancing program quality and implementing relevant youth development practices through engaging expanded learning opportunities. OregonASK recognizes the crucial link between what children and youth experience in afterschool programs and the skills and knowledge of the program staff who work with them. To assist in improving the overall quality of afterschool programs in Oregon, OregonASK and its partners are creating ways to develop and support the professional development infrastructure, including the use of the Oregon Quality Standards for Afterschool and Summer Programs, as well as Core Competencies. The intention of these documents is to guide programs and professionals in assessing their own level of quality, to assist policy makers in recognizing and supporting quality improvement efforts, and to enhance the overall development and enrichment of children and youth in Oregon.

ENGAGING PARENTS & FAMILIES

Afterschool programs help build safer, stronger, and smarter communities by keeping youth safe and helping families balance work and life. Family engagement activities can range from supporting academic work to involvement in parent and community organizations – “anything that engages more than one generation in learning positively impacts the entire family, and in turn the larger community” (National Center for Families Learning, 2014). Quality programs work to engage parents and families through strategic family-led activities and opportunities to build authentic, two-way exchange of information, mutual trust, and respect between families and community groups and programs.

INCREASING SCHOOL & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Effective programs involve community partners to support locally-driven solutions, get students ready for college or a career, and strengthen relationships with local industry. High-quality afterschool and summer learning provide a unique opportunity to support and expand school day/school year learning in creative ways. Communities can come together to provide enrichment in learning through a shared vision and resources, collaborative planning, and emphasis on high achievement.

NOW IS THE TIME TO ELEVATE EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND THE THOUSANDS OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS WHO SUPPORT YOUTH AND FAMILIES THROUGH QUALITY PROGRAMS.