Expanded Learning Opportunities Handbook

RIASPA

RHODE ISLAND AFTERSCHOOL PLUS ALLIANCE

AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE OF

United Way

United Way of Rhode Island

Contents

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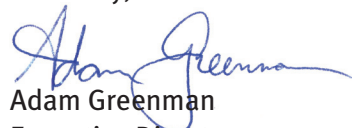
November 19, 2012

Dear Educators:

Thank you for attending the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance's (RIASPA) Summit on Expanded Learning Opportunities for high school credit. We are excited to share with you the lessons we have learned from several years of work in Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket, and to help you think about how this type of work can be implemented in your districts.

This handbook is designed to help you with the process of planning and implementing rigorous, standards-based expanded learning opportunities for high school credit. It contains essential questions to help guide planning and implementation, and presents potential options for addressing some critical issues related to this work, including scheduling, the role of teachers, and how to ensure students are supported.

RIASPA is committed to working with you throughout this process. We have opportunities for free technical assistance to help districts plan and implement this work, and we have access to other districts, both locally and regionally, that have engaged in this work and can also be a resource to you. We believe that shifting away from seat-time and toward systems of competency-based learning is critical to student success now and into the future. In addition, we believe that expanded learning opportunities for high school credit have natural connections to the common core state standards, and provide students with necessary 21st-century skills like problem solving, critical thinking, and real-world application that are crucial to post-graduation success.

We hope that you find this handbook useful, and we look forward to working with you today and into the future to create systems of expanded learning opportunities for high school credit in your local districts and schools.

Sincerely,

Adam Greenman
Executive Director

What Are Expanded Learning Opportunities?

Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) are opportunities for community-connected learning experiences that earn credit within and beyond the traditional classroom. They are student-centered, hands-on, and rigorous. Students that participate in ELOs work closely with a Teacher Mentor who is qualified in the subject the ELO is targeting. Community Mentors work with students to apply their learning in a real-world setting. There is a strong partnership among the three stakeholders:

• The school-based Teacher Mentor of record is responsible for granting credit and supporting students as they progress towards competency.

• The Community Mentor is responsible for guiding applied learning and collaborating with the student.

• The student is responsible for the learning process based on their interest and development throughout the project.

ELOs can take place during the school day as part of the regular curriculum, after school, or during the summer, and are driven by students' particular interests and passions. This handbook is designed for Teacher Mentors, Community Mentors, and students who are working together to design ELOs for credit for either individual students or groups of students. *ELOs can be in any subject and for any student.* At the heart of ELOs are the following benefits:

• High-quality learning requires collaboration among school, community, and families.

• Students learn best when they participate in the design of their own learning.

• Teacher Mentors are vital to the ELO process – they ensure that learning is based on academic- and competency-based standards.

• Community Mentors are instrumental to experiential learning that helps students to apply their learning in real-world settings.

• Learning can take place at all times of the day, in different kinds of environments, and in different ways.

• Learning can be simultaneously individualized to student learning styles and academically rigorous.

• ELO content is aligned to Rhode Island and Common Core State standards.

In addition to ensuring that students meet or exceed proficiency in required learning standards, and providing students with opportunities to pursue their passions, ELOs help students prepare for college and career by developing 21st century skills, including: critical thinking, creativity, innovation, flexibility, ethical and collaborative problem solving, effective use of applied technology, and interpersonal and leadership skills.

Implementation of ELOs begin to support the needs of students and the schools they attend, and they evolve over time as stakeholders gain experience and expand the network of Teacher Mentors and Community Mentors willing to participate and support this expanded approach to learning.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can participate in an ELO?

Any student can participate in an ELO if they want to:

- Study a topic that is not taught in school
- Pursue an issue they are passionate about or would like to gain experience in as a potential career pathway
- Learn outside of a traditional classroom setting
- Make up credit as an option in addition to or in place of Saturday or evening school or summer learning
- Complete a class that does not fit into their schedule

Teachers can serve as mentors if they are certified in a core subject or have sufficient expertise in an elective area that the student is receiving credit. It is important that Teacher Mentors are willing to make time to meet with students regularly to provide guidance and feedback.

Community Mentors provide students with the chance to apply their learning in a real-world setting. Community Mentors work with teachers to align their content to academic standards and meet other requirements as determined by the school and the district.

How long does it take for a student to complete an ELO for credit?

ELOs for credit take different amounts of time based on a project plan created by ELO teams [student(s), Teacher Mentor(s), Community Mentor(s)]. **ELOs are standards-based, not time-based**. This is an important distinction — students complete their ELOs when they have met all of their learning goals. When creating a project plan, teams must ensure that the students have enough time available to plan their ELO and build relationships with their mentors.

Can an ELO project be used as part of the Performance-Based Graduation Requirement Portfolio (PBGR)?

Yes, if the project is approved by the school. During the ELO planning process, students and Teacher Mentors should keep in mind and make note of the Performance-Based Graduation Requirements that are covered in the ELO in addition to the requirements needed to earn credit.

What kind of courses can you earn credit for with an ELO?

Electives or core credits in Math, Science, English, History, Art, and Physical Education/Health.

How do ELOs connect to classroom assignments?

When designing an ELO, the plan should include explicit connections to expanded learning opportunities such as exploring a career pathway or identifying an applied learning experience. The ELO is designed to increase the work the student is doing beyond the classroom assignment.

How many students can participate in an ELO?

ELOs can be designed as an individual or group experience. Each school needs to determine how many students can be engaged in the ELO process within a school year based upon the number of Teacher Mentors and Community Mentors that are available to support students' learning experiences. ELOs can be designed as a group experience based upon student interests and mentoring capacity.

Reasons to Participate in ELO

WHY DO TEACHER MENTORS PARTNER IN AN ELO?

- Create positive and enriching learning environments for students
- Build relationships with students as you work closely on group or individual projects
- Share with students your passions and interests
- Demonstrate connection with the community
- Deepens your practice as a teacher

WHY DO STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN AN ELO?

- Receive or recover credit towards graduation
- Strengthen student portfolios or senior projects
- Gain hands-on, real-world experience
- Explore a career or topic of interest
- Network, build relationships, gain references
- Stand out in the college admission process

WHY COMMUNITY MENTORS SHOULD PARTNER IN AN ELO?

- Strengthen community and school connections
- Enrich students' educational and applied learning opportunities
- Develop mentoring relationships with youth
- Shape future leaders and advocates in your field
- Gain exposure for your organization/company

General ELO Roles and Responsibilities

ELOs are a collaborative process. The key to the success of an ELO is the student's involvement in all aspects of the experience – including development of a plan and learning goals and the assessment of learning. The following describes the roles and responsibilities various individuals may perform during the ELO process:

ELO DIRECTOR AND STAFF

- Oversee ELO orientation and workshops.
- Connect students to Mentors.
- Clarify the role of each person in the ELO planning process.
- Ensure that assessment rubrics are utilized in all ELOs.
- Provide access to resources and support as needed.
- Coordinate and attend the final presentation of learning.
- Build and sustain relationships with Teacher Mentors, Community Mentors, and other stakeholders.

STUDENTS

- Customize their education.
- Work with ELO Director, Teacher Mentor, and Community Mentor to design ELO Plan.
- Participate in "ELO Readiness" workshops.
- Present ELO plan to critical stakeholders.
- Complete weekly assignment to reflect on ELO progress and identifying next steps in learning.
- Communicate regularly with Teacher Mentors and Community Mentors and the ELO Director.
- Fill out monthly progress reports.
- Follow through on timeline for assignments, self-assessment/reflections, and final assessment of learning.

TEACHER MENTORS
(Certified in subject matter of the ELO)

- Identify competencies with the students (i.e., what the student needs to learn).
- Collaborate with students to define how students will be assessed on those competencies and standards.
- Work with Community Mentor to ensure content is aligned to common core state standards.
- Assess student's mastery of pre-determined content (competencies), including input from Community Mentors and students.
- Oversee the ongoing and final assessment of student progress using rubrics, and provide frequent feedback to the student regarding progress.
- Complete the following during meetings with students: review students' reflections, help troubleshoot any issues that may arise, and provides leads for the students' research.

- Ensure that quarterly progress reports are sent to parents during report card dissemination.
- Attend and assess the students' final presentation of learning.

COMMUNITY MENTORS
(The specific role of the Community Mentor in ELO assessment is determined at the outset with the student, Teacher Mentor, and ELO Director.)

- Support and coach students in their ELO experience.
- Provide the students with timely, detailed feedback to develop skills, knowledge, problem-solving ability, creativity, and complex thinking, while reflecting on their learning.
- Serve as a rich source of knowledge and experience in the project area.
- Provide a perspective that links students' interests with relevant career goals and aspirations.
- Attend the students' final presentation of learning.

PARENTS/GUARDIANS
(Student success is linked to family involvement and engagement, encouraged throughout the ELO process.)

- Become familiar with all aspects of the ELO process.
- Provide support and coaching to the student throughout the ELO.
- Receive quarterly progress reports on the student that align with report card cycles.
- Attend the students' final presentation of learning.

Resources Available as You Consider Planning for ELOs

DEVELOPMENT OF A DISTRICT PLAN FOR ELOS

The District creates a strategic plan to support the implementation of ELOs within their high school(s). Prior to convening the planning team, the ELO champion at the District level should consider the resources and options available to support a planning team to develop a strategic plan.

Central Falls, one of three school districts to initiate the ELO process in Rhode Island, features a wide array of resources, research, and other information on their website (http://www.cfschools.net/schools/central-falls-high-school/expanded-learning-opportunities/). Perhaps most useful to a district just starting the ELO process are the examples of resources they have developed to obtain and guide information on all aspects of the ELO process. Central Falls has generously offered to share these documents with other school districts in Rhode Island interested in initiating ELOs for high school credit projects at their schools. Documents are available at: http://www.cfschools.net/schools/central-falls-high-school/expanded-learning-opportunities/elo-forms/ and can be edited to reflect the needs and goals of each individual districts' ELO process.

In Providence, PASA and The Hub have built an open-source-connected learning platform (www.hubprov.com) designed to allow ELO students, with their Teacher Mentors and Community Mentors, to share, connect, reflect, and expand their learning experiences anytime and anywhere. The goal of HubProv.com is to deepen student engagement with their learning and to share the unique contexts where students are learning.

Woonsocket has recently launched a website (http://elowoonsocket.com/) that showcases ELO work that has been completed in the district alongside current ELO work. Similar to Central Falls, they also have an extensive collection of documents that help guide the ELO process in their district that might be useful to other districts just beginning the ELO process. These documents can be found under the "Resources" section of their website. While similar to many of the documents found on the Central Falls website, the Woonsocket ELO documents do differ in some ways that might be useful for you. It is worth comparing documents from the both districts when trying to decide what might work for you.

Student participation paperwork currently being used:

- Interest Form
- Permission Slip
- Media Form/Photo Release
- Letter of Intent
- Planning Tool
- Learning Agreement
- Reflection form
- Approval Document
- ELO Validation Committee Approval Form

Community Mentor participation documents currently being used:

- Community Mentor Interest Form
- Confidentiality Form
- Volunteer Protocol Form
- BCI Clearance Letter

Planning Guidance

STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND ATTENDANCE

- How are unexcused absences and tardiness addressed in relation to ELO participation?

- What are the procedures that must be followed if a student needs to leave the school building for an ELO-related meeting or event during school hours?

- What are the parameters for canceling a meeting with an ELO Director, Teacher Mentor, or Community Mentor?

- If a student is not meeting learning benchmarks and goals throughout the project, how will it be addressed?

ASSESSMENT

- Is there an assessment rubric that the student receives prior to beginning the assignment? If so, does it explain necessary steps to achieve proficiency, and how the project will be assessed?

- Is there a standard rubric used to assess the project, or will one be designed specifically for the project?

- Who completes the assessment? What are the roles and responsibilities of each team member at the different stages of the project?

GRADING

- Will the student receive a letter and/or number grade for the ELO?

- Who will determine how the ELO assessment will be translated into a letter and/or number grade?

- What happens if a student does not achieve the level of competency that is required to master the standards?

- Are other community stakeholders invited to help with assessment of the final presentations?

- If there is a portfolio piece, will it be assessed without being graded?

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Who retains student information, and how is it disseminated as necessary?

- Has parent permission been attained to provide disclosure of information to the Community Mentor?

ACCESSIBILITY

- Are there any restrictions (e.g., attendance, behavior record, etc.) on which students can participate in ELOs?

- Is the process of an ELO amended in any way to support students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)? Are accommodations, as outlined in a student's IEP plan, part of the planning process?

COMMUNITY SITES/MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS

- Is the work being done approved by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training for the student's age group?

- What paperwork, in addition to BCI clearance, do schools/districts require from Community Sites/Mentors?

- What are the rules for Community Sites/Mentors? What are the repercussions for Community Sites/Mentors who do not abide by these rules?

- How is student safety ensured and monitored?

- What practices indicate Community Sites'/Mentors' alignment to the values of the school, district, and ELO Initiative?

ELO Planning Process at the High School

A Planning Committee can help determine how students can attain credit for Expanded Learning Opportunities and how ELOs can be integrated into a school's culture and academic structure.

POTENTIAL MEMBERS OF PLANNING COMMITTEE

- District Representatives
- Principal or Other Administrative Staff
- Guidance Counselors
- Teachers/Teacher Mentors
- Community Mentors
- Students
- Parents/Guardians

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS FOR THE PLANNING COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER?

- Who will manage ELO work?
- How is student readiness determined?
- What is the validation process?
- Who are the organizations and people that need to be at the table to make this work successful?
- How will information about ELOs be disseminated to Teacher Mentors, Community Mentors, students, and families?

- What systems need to be in place for successful implementation of ELO work, and how can these systems be sustained?
- How are ELOs assessed to ensure they are meeting core competency requirements and Performance-Based Graduation Requirements?
- How are completed ELOs presented? What common requirements are there in final presentations?

When the Planning Committee determines that a school is ready to go forward with ELO work and all systems are in place, it should begin to put together a Planning Tool that provides a way to document the standards that students must meet to receive credit for their work; ensure that the benchmark activities are aligned to standards; and demonstrate how the student will be assessed.

THE INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP ELO PLANNING TOOL

- How will the Planning Tool be used throughout the ELO process – from inception to completion?
- What are some key components of the Planning Tool? Who is responsible for determining what makes up each component, and who is responsible for evaluating each component?
- How is work done throughout the ELO process related to the different goals and components of the Planning Tool?
- How does assessment align with the Planning Tool?
- What benchmark activities are a part of the Planning Tool, and how are they incorporated and assessed as the ELO progresses?
- At what point in the planning process is the final product determined? How is it recorded and planned for as part of the Planning Tool?

ELO Funding

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN AN ELO?

With effort placed on planning and design, ELOs for high school credit can be achieved with few startup costs, and minimal costs as ELOs are piloted and implemented. The major costs include technical assistance, professional development, and personnel costs to implement ELOs. The information below includes potential costs to implementing ELOs as well as a menu of options for resourcing the project and ensuring that minimal costs are expended for ELOs.

MAJOR COSTS FOR ELO INITIATIVES

The major monetary cost for implementing an ELO program is the technical assistance and professional development needed for the planning teams, and the development of a process for expanded learning opportunities. RIASPA has funding to cover these costs for districts. Additionally, RIASPA has limited funding to pay stipends for teachers to participate in professional development, which can be garnered on a first-come, first-served basis. In addition to monetary resources, planning ELOs for high school credit takes time. When designing ELOs for high school credit, Central Falls,

Providence, and Woonsocket planned for eight months, with at least one, three-hour meeting per month usually held after the school day ended. In at least one case, the planning took place during the school day, meaning coverage was needed for the teacher(s) participating on the planning team.

The other major cost associated with an ELO program is the cost of coordinating the effort. In all cases, this involves a staff member who coordinates this as all or part of her or his role. RIASPA believes this does not need to be a new full-time position, and there are several options for who can fill that role and ways to resource the role. Those options are discussed below with other funding options.

OTHER COSTS

Other costs involved in offering ELOs for high school credit focus on the cost of actually completing an ELO. On the school side, these costs include supplies, materials, equipment, potential fees (college tuition for instance), and transportation. Not all ELOs will accrue these costs, but examples of ELOs from Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket have experienced some of these costs in the past. In some cases, the equipment necessary for ELOs may be

readily available at the school. This can include computers, cameras, or other types of equipment. Supplies may also be available from the school or included in a budget for ELOs. Options for transportation can include students' personal transportation, RIPTA tickets, or the potential for community partners to come to the school building to avoid travel costs.

Community partners also have costs that they encumber from being a part of the ELO process. In many cases, staff time for the community partner is the greatest cost, but they may also have supplies and materials costs. Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket have each approached community partner compensation differently, but all sites found that especially in the initial planning and pilot phases, community partners were usually willing to absorb the costs of participation in the ELO initiative. Options for community partner compensation are detailed below.

FUNDING OPTIONS

The following is a list of potential sources for funding ELOs for high school credit. While not all funding sources are available to all districts, this list captures the various federal, state, and private funding sources that can support ELO Initiatives.

- Private grant funding in partnership with a community partner. Community organizations have access to grant funding that schools do not necessarily have the ability to access. Schools can improve the chances of private support by providing letters of support to the grant applications of community partners.

- Local corporations may have an interest in funding these initiatives, especially if it is coupled with the opportunity to participate in the ELOs for high school credit process as a community partner.

- Parent organizations and alumni can resource the initiative and may also be excellent community partners, depending on their area of expertise. For example, a member of the alumni who works for a web design firm may be able to leverage a relationship with their firm to be a community partner for a web design ELO.

- Local service organizations like Rotary International or the Elks may fund individual ELOs or may be able to fund a specific cost related to an ELO project.

- Districts may be eligible to secure an AmeriCorps VISTA to oversee or help to coordinate the ELO process.

- School Improvement Grant funds can be used to support ELOs for high school credit. Central Falls and Providence are examples of schools utilizing this funding stream to support students achieving ELOs for high school credit.

- Federal resources, including Title I, Title III, and IDEA can be utilized for this effort, depending upon the student population that is being targeted for ELOs.

- 21st Century Community Learning Center funding is also available. This is a federal funding source specifically utilized for out-of-school time initiatives.

RESOURCING OPTIONS

The following section outlines specific ways that districts can implement an ELOs for high school credit process on a pilot basis through the shifting of resources. This list is not exhaustive and is based on how others have resourced these initiatives, especially in the piloting phase. Districts should consider how each of these options would apply to them, and whether they are feasible options in their specific community.

- Schools may want to consider structuring initial ELOs for high school credit as group ELOs with one or two teachers serving as the coordinators and teacher of record for the ELOs. This model has been achieved in Providence and allowed for between 15 and 20 ELO students to participate in a variety of ELOs with community partners. This could be done at little cost to the district, since those students would be equal to one classroom teaching period for a teacher. The teacher would then assume the role of coordination. This model allows ELOs to exist with minimal disruption to the school schedule or to teacher and other staff resources.

- Non-classroom personnel may also have the ability to resource this initiative. Librarians often coordinate access to the various equipment that students would need to participate in ELOs, and also have the ability to garner community resources and community partners for students. Hiring a part-time ELO Director may be another option for schools to coordinate ELOs for high school credit.

- Various incentives can be arranged for community partners depending on the type of community partner. For a for-profit community partner, the volunteer hours that an employee provides can be included as corporate philanthropy and volunteer opportunities, and can also be counted for tax purposes. For non-profit community partners, small stipends can be considered, but districts can also consider other ways to support non-profit partners. This can include the use of in-kind space, support for grant opportunities sought by the non-profit, or a small financial incentive. Each of these models exists in Rhode Island programs as well as programs in New Hampshire.

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