



## I Want to Know More

### A Leadership in Action Supplement

I Want to Know More is a selection of information and resources for education leaders, parents, and community members who want to learn more about the teaching and learning strategies taking place in today's most innovative schools.

## What Are Extended Learning Opportunities?

Extended learning opportunities (ELOs) are powerful learning experiences that support and recognize learning that happens anytime and anywhere. Increasingly, schools are identifying and putting into practice methods to design, document, and assess meaningful learning that happens outside the classroom and beyond a traditional course sequence.

The scope of ELOs can vary. A continuum of learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom includes:

1. Teacher-designed activities that happen outside of classroom walls as a component of a course. These can include field trips and service learning.
2. Learning programs designed by adults that are controlled by the school but happen outside the school building. These may be early college or dual enrollment programs, career and technical education programs, jobsite learning opportunities, and other formal internship programs.
3. Learning experiences that are identified and designed by students. In this approach, inspired by their interests, students take their learning beyond the classroom or other experiences designed by the school. For example, a student could plan a study to examine algae growth in the pond in a local park, and then work with a local science lab to test her results and present the information publicly. If she could demonstrate that she met her school's standards in content and skill areas, this would count as part of the evidence required to meet those standards.

In many districts throughout New England and beyond, these experiences are an increasingly significant source of learning and achievement. This brief focuses primarily on the third approach described above, learning experiences identified and designed by students, and how they work best within proficiency-based learning systems.

## An ELO Program in Action

In response to the need for engaging, relevant, and equitable approaches to teaching and learning, schools are finding ways to support and value student learning that transpires outside the classroom. One such school, **Winnacunnet High School** in New Hampshire, offers insight into what it takes to initiate and evolve an equitable and effective ELO program.

Winnacunnet High School is located in the southern Seacoast region of New Hampshire, and serves 1,050 students from four towns. Three staff members deeply involved in developing ELOs at Winnacunnet—ELO Coordinator Donna Couture, Curriculum Coordinator David Hobbs, and Principal William McGowan—offered their perspectives on the school's ELO program, which began its seventh year in the fall of 2017. Motivated by changes in New Hampshire's state education policy

that supported ELO implementation, the school assembled a committee in 2011 to map out the initiative, and hired Couture as its ELO coordinator in 2012.

The school has since evolved and expanded its ELO program. The program now supports more than 250 ELOs annually. These include course-based, teacher-designed out-of-school experiences, working as a classroom aide, and unique instances such as a student who learned with a real estate agent. This student became so engaged and inspired that she took the state real estate licensing course, received her real estate license, and closed on a house while still in school.

Winnacunnet's ELO team emphasized that a successful ELO program demands proper staffing. Noting that Couture's full-time dedication has been essential to Winnacunnet's ELO program, principal McGowan shared that because no additional funding was available, he hired Couture through a reallocation of existing resources, taking advantage of a guidance counselor's retirement to create the ELO coordinator position. During the past year, McGowan was able to add capacity to the ELO program by bringing on a teacher part-time for additional support.

Curriculum coordinator Hobbs emphasized that Winnacunnet's ELO program developed in conjunction with the school's process of strengthening its proficiency-based learning approach. In particular, establishing content area proficiencies was an essential part of ELO program implementation.

As a result of ELOs and other non-classroom-based approaches such as online learning, Winnacunnet's students feel more in control of their progress toward graduation. "For students, it's like Connect Four," Hobbs observed. "They can get to graduation in whatever way that they see fit, as long as they fill in the gaps as they go."

The impact on staff members was of particular concern to Winnacunnet's ELO team during the early days of implementation. Couture shared that while no teachers disputed the benefits of the ELO program, they wondered about the ways the role of classroom teachers was shifting. Teachers wanted to understand the role of ELOs in the school's proficiency-based system and sought assurance that ELOs would not necessarily depopulate their traditional classes. The school chose to use some of their federally-allocated professional development funds to create focused professional learning to support teachers' understanding both of ELOs and the proficiency-based approach overall.

The process of teachers fully integrating ELOs into their work is ongoing. "Teachers' pedagogy is different now," principal McGowan said. "We need to find a way to acknowledge what they are doing and support them in the process so that ELOs can be added to their daily practice." In order to make this shift public and well-understood, Winnacunnet's ELO team and student participants have presented to the school board and community about the value of ELOs in order to ensure financial, governance, and community support.

Winnacunnet High School offers a range of ELO categories to guide students' choices. These include:

**Service Aide:** Service aides are learning experiences where students provide assistance to a classroom teacher. Duties can include, but are not limited to, lesson preparation, assisting in the classroom, technology support, and creating and maintaining visual classroom displays.

**Career Exploration:** Career exploration is an opportunity for a student to investigate a specific occupation or career path. This learning experience requires the student to conduct independent research, informational interviews with professionals, and job shadows when appropriate.

**Internship:** An internship is a temporary, unpaid, position where a student is paired with a professional in the community (a school-based professional could serve in this role) in order to gain practical experience in an occupation or profession.

**Project-Based Learning:** Project-based learning is a learning experience where students gain knowledge and skills by investigating a topic of their choice. Students actively explore real-world problems and respond to complex questions and challenges. This will often require the student to draw upon previous coursework and apply it in a very practical way to their project. Project-based learning experiences usually require a community partner.

These categories, and much more, can be found on Winnacunnet High School's [ELO website](#).

## ELOs within Proficiency-Based Systems

New England states have varying forms of statewide proficiency-based approaches and some have state-level policies and guidance that support ELO implementation. Among these, New Hampshire has a particularly strong commitment to ELOs, devoting significant state guidance and support, facilitating a statewide ELO coordinator network, and publishing resources.

For more information, check out the New Hampshire Department of Education's [website](#) and this resource, "[The New Hampshire Extended Learning Opportunity Program Design Handbook](#)."

At Winnacunnet and elsewhere, for learning outside of school building to be meaningful and equitable, ELOs must be aligned directly to specific learning goals and standards. By providing students with the agency to identify and design their own ELOs, supporting them in aligning those experiences to standards, and assessing them on their demonstration of proficiency against those standards, schools can formally recognize the many ways every student can meet the same standard.

## ELOs and Equity

Access to learning experiences beyond those traditionally offered must also be available to all students. **Research shows** that while ELOs benefit lower-achieving students, higher-achieving students tend to participate in them more frequently. This can be because students with more advantages may have the connections, time, and resources needed to identify opportunities. What can schools do to ensure that all students have access to a range of learning experiences that will take them outside the classroom and into new opportunities?

- Make sure that ELOs and related learning experiences allow students to demonstrate that they have met a graduation expectation. This will happen more easily in a fully proficiency-based system, in which course-level or content area proficiencies and skills can align to a variety of learning experiences.
- Create learning opportunities that really can happen anywhere and at any time—including within the school building itself. Students can collaborate with teachers as aides, run a school store, publish a school newspaper, or provide translation services. Each of these activities can correspond to specific course standards and skills.
- Provide adequate support for ELO implementation to ensure that the ELO program can be flexible and responsive to all students' needs. A skilled ELO coordinator, along with a deep bench of community contacts, a willing school staff, and teachers with appropriate professional learning are all must-haves. Other critical factors include transportation and resources for communication to facilitate understanding about ELOs within and outside the school community.

## Extended Learning Opportunities vs. Extended Learning Time: What's the Difference?

It's worth taking a moment to clarify the differences between ELOs and extended (again, sometimes expanded) learning time (ELT). ELT often refers to extending the actual school day, and is an approach to improving learning outcomes that Massachusetts, in particular, has adopted. ELT policies focus on providing additional instructional time within traditional classroom settings and course sequences. While there is some overlap between the two approaches, they're not the same, because ELOs offer additional flexibility, personalization, and relevance to students, as well as including a wider variety of educators and professionals in the learning process.

One advantage of ELT is that it may provide more assurance of increased equity, because it necessarily applies to all students attending a certain school. Within an ELT schedule and system, multiple pathways may be possible, but without an ELO program they would likely be restricted to online learning, independent or small group study, and variation in pace. When schools offer an ELO approach with an ELT schedule, students may be able to leave the classroom and school building to pursue learning opportunities.

### Additional Resources

**Website: New Hampshire Department of Education on Extended Learning Opportunities**

<http://www.education.nh.gov/innovations/elo/>

**Website: Next Step New Hampshire's *ELO: Beyond Classroom***

<http://beyondclassroom.org/>

**Website: Winnacunnet High School's ELO Program**

<https://sites.google.com/a/warriors.winnacunnet.org/elo/>

**Report: *Effects of Extended Learning Opportunities on Student Outcomes***

<https://www.nmefoundation.org/resources/student-centered-learning/results-from-a-two-year-study-of-the-effects-of-ex>

**Resource: *New Hampshire Extended Learning Opportunity Program Design Handbook***

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7DN5HRje-OWa0dwN2plS0pXYXM/view?pref=2&pli=1>