EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES:
HELPING LATINO STUDENTS ACHIEVE SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION

As states, districts, and schools work to improve academic rigor so that all students graduate prepared for college and careers, it has become clear that more learning time and building additional capacity within the public education system are essential. These issues have particular implications for Latino* students, especially English language learners (ELLs). Hispanic children face multiple barriers to educational success, including high levels of poverty, low levels of parental education, and disparate rates of preschool and prekindergarten participation.

As the largest minority group in the United States,[1] Latino students have the potential to benefit greatly from expanded learning time. The most recent data show that in 2011, 14% of Hispanic 16 to 24 year olds were high school dropouts.[2] Although the dropout rate is half the level it was in 2000 (28%), Hispanics continue to lag behind Whites in a number of key education measures.[3] Only 71% of Latino students graduate high school with their classmates, compared to 83% of their White counterparts.[4] Young Hispanic college students are less likely than their White counterparts to be enrolled in college full time, enroll in a four-year college (56% versus 72%), attend a selective college, and complete a bachelor's degree.[5]

A large portion (40%) of Latinos are ELLs.[6] ELLs often need support beyond that which can be provided during a traditional school day.[7] Common language instruction strategies involve pulling ELLs out of the regular classroom; as a result, ELLs receive less classroom time and less content exposure than their peers.[8] Not only do ELLs miss out on valuable content instruction when they are pulled from class, but they require additional time to develop academic English because they are only beginning to build their vocabulary and reading skills.[9] In addition, many schools across the country simply do not have the expertise to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students and families.

High-quality expanded learning opportunities (ELOs)—including after-school, before-school, summer, and expanded day, week, and year programs—done in partnership with community-based organizations have the potential to improve learning for Latino students. A growing body of research shows that a variety of approaches during summer[10] and before and after the traditional school day[11] can bolster young people's school engagement and improve their chances of graduating and achieving success in college and careers.

In addition, various local community-based programs have seen their participants beat the odds, proving that with the right interventions and resources, any child can achieve. High-quality ELO programs partner with community organizations, a strategy that is particularly important when serving ELL students.

Given the potential impacts of expanded learning policies and practices on Latino students and their communities, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has put together this issue brief to examine recent research on ELOs, the policy landscape affecting these programs, and recommendations for policymakers and program providers.

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* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

DEFINING EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

NCLR defines ELOs as academic support and enrichment programs provided beyond traditional school hours. These include extending the hours of a school day or days in the school year, before- and after-school programs, and summer learning opportunities.

What Is Expanded Learning?

Expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) vary in scope and size, and different communities often refer to them in a variety of ways. Commonly used terminology and definitions related to expanded learning—all of which may be provided through a school-community partnership—are:

- *Expanded Learning Opportunities:* Any programming beyond or outside of the traditional school day

- *Out-of-School Time:* Any learning time outside of the traditional school day—not inclusive of extended day or year

- *After-School Programs:* Programs provided after the traditional school day ends

- *Extended Day or Extended Learning Time:* Longer school hours within the school day

- *Extended Year:* Increasing the length of the school year, either by days or weeks

- *Summer Learning:* Programs provided during the summer months

- *Expanded Learning Time:* Can be used in reference to an extended-day program or to generalize about any time that expands learning time, both during and outside of the school day

WHY EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The Achievement Gap and Expanded Learning Opportunities

An achievement gap exists between Latino students and their White peers. Only 19% of fourth-grade Hispanic students test proficient or above on reading and only 24% test proficient or above on math, compared to their White peers who score 44% and 52%, respectively.[12]

Although many factors contribute to the achievement gap, studies show that children who lack opportunities in the summer to practice what they learned during the school year lose up to two months of grade level equivalency.[13] Students from higher socioeconomic status return to school in the fall with a measurable educational advantage over their lower-income peers because of additional school-related learning and educational activities during the summer months.[14] Unequal summer learning opportunities during elementary years can explain almost two-thirds of the achievement gap by ninth grade.[15]

Access to engaging summer learning programs can help close the achievement gap, but it is also important to provide access to ELOs during the regular school year. Afternoon hours are the peak time for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex. Students who participate in after-school programming are much less likely to experiment with substances or partake in criminal activities than those who do not participate.[16] More than 15

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million school-age children are alone and unsupervised between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.[17] with no place to go. Only 8.4 million K–12 children (about 12%) participate in after-school programs, but an additional 18.5 million would participate if a quality program were available in their community.[18] Additionally, research shows that the students most likely to benefit from expanded learning programs, particularly low-income and minority students, currently do not have access to effective programs,[19] are more likely to be unsupervised during nonschool hours, and suffer disproportionately from summer learning loss.[20]

Raising Latino Student Achievement with Expanded Learning Opportunities

Researchers have found that students in high-quality expanded learning programs achieve positive academic and social outcomes, such as improved attendance, grades, graduation rates, college acceptance rates, and self-esteem.[21] For example, a 2007 study by the University of Chicago found that After School Matters (ASM) participants were 2.7 times more likely to graduate from high school than similar nonparticipating students.[22] Benefits of the program go beyond graduating from high school: ASM participants with a GPA above 3.0 enroll in college at a higher rate than district counterparts, particularly for Latino students.[†]

Meanwhile, in California, Kittridge Street Elementary School, a Title I school with a large Latino student population (80%), has shown increased student achievement due to its partnership with Los Angeles's Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (LA's BEST)—a nationally recognized after-school education, enrichment, and recreation program that serves more than 28,000 children with the greatest needs and fewest resources. For example, in 2008, Kittridge saw 12% proficiency gains on the California Standards Test.[23]

Increasing Success for English Language Learners

The impact of expanded learning programs cannot be overstated. After-school programs serving large proportions of ELLs have shown significant gains in English language acquisition. In California's Central Valley, between one-quarter and one-third of students are classified as ELLs, which is nearly five times the national average.[24] The Central Valley Afterschool Foundation has dramatically improved academic performance and school attendance among its attendees. As a result, 23% of ELLs were reclassified as fluent in English, compared to about 7% for all students in the region.[25] In addition, one-third of the ELLs who frequently attended the foundation's after-school programs were reclassified as fluent during the course of their schooling. Data also show that while only 15% of the foundation's students were reading at grade level at the beginning of the school year, almost 50% were at grade level by the end of the year.[26]

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WHAT MAKES EXPANDED LEARNING PROGRAMS EFFECTIVE FOR LATINO STUDENTS?

Best practices in the field point to particular elements that make ELOs successful in promoting Latino and ELL student outcomes. Generally, studies on the effects of time and learning show that it is necessary to increase "engaged time"—time that a student is actively involved in mastering or reviewing a specific skill—to see results.[27] It is no surprise then that ELOs that engage Latino students in effective instruction and provide proper academic support see their students make greater academic gains than programs that do not.

Through NCLR's Affiliates and the NCLR Expanded Learning Time Network, NCLR continues to build on existing research and assessment tools to address the unique needs of community organizations and schools serving Latino students and their families. NCLR has hosted roundtables[28] and created materials, such as "Core Qualities for Successful Expanded Learning Time Programs,"[29] to improve the ability of all expanded learning programs to serve Latino and ELL children. Some of the key elements that have shown results for Latinos include effective family outreach and engagement, strong school-community partnerships, and effective culturally and linguistically competent staff and joint professional development. The following sections discuss these key elements, which are essential for Latino student success in expanded learning programs.

Effective Family Outreach and Engagement

Effective outreach and family engagement are concerns for all ELOs; families want to feel safe leaving their children with providers and ensure their children are getting the support they need, especially academically.[30] Successful programs make efforts to involve parents in special events and day-to-day activities, while also providing the necessary academic support, often aligned to school curricula. Giving children the opportunity to practice skills from school beyond the confines of a traditional classroom allows for greater depth and understanding, and ultimately leads to improved academic performance.[31] Furthermore, studies show that connections matter; relationships among staff, schools, families, youth, and communities are crucial in getting students invested in the programming.[32]

School-Community Partnerships Enhance Expanded Learning Opportunities

In a time when budgets are tight, collaboration, partnerships, and the streamlining of resources are economically sensible. The education system strives to help students succeed academically and develop to their full potential, but schools cannot do it alone. When traditional schools or school-run after-school programs cannot offer services themselves, community-based organizations can fill the gap and, in turn, enhance the effectiveness and reach of an after-school or expanded learning program's specific activities. For example, the Raul Yzaguirre School for Success in Houston seamlessly integrates community art and music resources by working with a local nonprofit organization that offers a Mariachi after-school club. The nonprofit not only offers student instruction, but it also has the capacity to provide costumes and instruments.

Teaching, Helping, Inspiring and Nurturing Kids (THINK) Together, an after-school program that incorporates academic support aligned with targeted content standards, healthy living and physical activity, and enrichment activities based on student interest, staff talents, and cultural relevancy, has a long track record of improving academic success. When three charter schools in South Central Los Angeles implemented THINK Together's after-school program for the majority of their students, twice as many students scored at proficient or above on English and math standardized tests after two years.

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Strong School-Community Partnerships

Successful school-based programs often champion their ability to create meaningful partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), businesses, and local colleges. [33] Advocates emphasize these partnerships as the most essential component for any expanded learning offering.[34]

Community-based organizations often form a critical bridge between Latino families and academic programs. These organizations are familiar with the communities they serve, often have bilingual staff and personal connections in the community, and offer relevant cultural programming.[35] As a result, these providers are uniquely suited to connect with Latino families—and do so more effectively than school-based providers. The highest-performing expanded learning programs capitalize on these resources by forming partnerships with CBOs, enabling them to more fully integrate their unique skills and services into the school community. Research also shows that when families are engaged with students' academic progress, students perform better and are more engaged in the classroom.[36] Surveys of successful programs with high Latino populations note that they can provide valuable support services and enhance the reach and effectiveness of a program's offerings. In addition, Latino families are more comfortable interacting with staff from CBOs than teachers and administrators in schools.[37]

Effective Culturally and Linguistically Competent Staff and Joint Professional Development

Managers of successful ELOs emphasize the need for a staff that is sensitive to the community and participants' academic needs and lower turnover rates than normally experienced in CBOs. Program supervisors and families alike express frustration with low staff-retention rates, and successful programs cite quality professional development and benefits as important components in retaining experienced staff.[38] Traditional degree programs often lack requirements for practitioners to acquire the appropriate skills, attitude, and knowledge for dealing with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population—competencies that can be attained only with hands-on experience and specialized instruction.[39] Although there is no one correct approach to professional development, researchers, practitioners, and advocates agree on a few basic components, including basing training programs in research and data, emphasizing collaboration between leadership and staff, providing content-rich instruction, and being financially viable for the long term.[40] Having experienced and trained staff in ELOs is equivalent to having quality teachers in the classroom; those staffers will be able to make the best use of the time allotted and have a greater positive impact on the children.[41]

UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

Many federal- and state-level policy initiatives seek to promote expanded learning time. Some proposals add more time to the school day and year, while others take innovative approaches to persuade schools and districts to engage community-based organizations and business partners to fundamentally restructure the school day and outside learning opportunities to serve student needs. Depending on the type of expanded learning program, various federal funding sources can be used to support programming, such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program and School Improvement Grants (SIG) within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as well as the Race to the Top grant program.

The current authorization of ESEA, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), includes a provision in Title I that allows additional funding for providing supplemental educational services (SES) for eligible children in failing schools, as designated by state educational agencies. In 2006–07, 3.3 million students were eligible for Title I SES, representing a six-fold increase since 2002–03.[42] These children are eligible for additional services in language arts, reading, and math. Additionally, funding may be used for tutoring, after-school services, and summer school programs. This

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funding can help after-school programs develop, expand, and improve their capacity to contribute to the success of the lowest-performing students in the lowest-performing schools.[43]

When signed into law in 2001, NCLB was authorized through 2007, with the intent that any necessary changes to the law would be made at that time. The law is now six years overdue for reauthorization. In the absence of congressional action on the reauthorization of ESEA, the Obama Administration created a new and controversial policy that allows states to request a waiver to discontinue key provisions of ESEA if they implement certain education reforms in their place.[44] Under this ESEA flexibility, states can make the 20% set-aside for SES optional for some schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 22% of students enrolled in schools not meeting adequate yearly progress in 2009 received free tutoring through SES funding—22% of these students were Latino. The new waiver policy could result in schools and districts redirecting funding that would support SES to other areas, eliminating valuable tutoring and after-school programs entirely and further limiting access to needed services for Latino students.

Another provision of ESEA, Title IV, authorizes formula grants targeted toward creating community learning centers. These centers—known as 21st CCLC—serve approximately 1.5 million students[45] and provide academic enrichment opportunities during nonschool hours for children, particularly students in high-poverty and low-performing schools. Annual performance report data from 21st CCLC grantees across the country demonstrate that regular attendees improve their reading and math grades.[46] The program's authorizing legislation (1998 and 2001) encouraged partnerships with community-based organizations and allowed grant money to be used only outside the school day. ESEA flexibility waivers and the FY 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act, however, have broadened the scope of the 21st CCLC program, allowing funds to be used to support expanded learning time during the school day as well as activities during nonschool hours or periods when school is not in session.

With ESEA flexibility waivers already in place, Congress is moving forward on ESEA reauthorization. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), chairman of the Health, Education, Pensions and Labor (HELP) Committee, introduced,[47] marked up,[48] and passed[49] S. 1094, the *Strengthening America's Schools Act of 2013*,[50] through committee. This bill provides support for systemic change and capacity-building through the reauthorization and improvement of the 21st CCLC program. However, Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), ranking member of the HELP Committee, introduced his own version of ESEA reauthorization, the *Every Child Ready for College or Career Act*.[51] This legislation, which eliminated the 21st CCLC program, was offered as a substitute amendment during committee consideration of the Harkin bill.

Similarly, Representative John Kline (R-MN), chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, introduced the *Student Success Act* (H.R. 5), which eliminates the 21st CCLC program. Meanwhile, during the markup of the *Student Success Act,* the Senior Democrat member, Representative George Miller (D-CA), offered a substitute amendment that maintained the 21st CCLC program.[52] Although Senator Alexander's and Representative Miller's amendments were voted down, they highlight a lack of bipartisan support for the 21st CCLC program—or the broader ESEA legislation.

The U.S. Department of Education during the Obama Administration has been vocal about its support for expanded learning time as a cornerstone of educational reform, particularly as it functions within the school setting. Most notably, the department has encouraged states and districts to adopt extended-day programs through grant competitions like Race to the Top.[53] The department has also provided guidance for turnaround schools and SIGs, another part of ESEA Title I.[54]

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Efforts to broaden the scope of the 21st CCLC program through expanded learning during the school day can have a positive impact if they are done in close collaboration with community partners such as NCLR Affiliates, include joint professional development, and employ effective family outreach and engagement strategies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the policy focus on standards-based reform and high expectations for all students, NCLR recognizes the potential impact ELOs can have on Latino student achievement. Moreover, NCLR is in a unique position to leverage the work of its Affiliates throughout the country to advocate for ELOs that meet the unique needs of Latino children and their families. In that capacity, NCLR recommends that programs implemented by community-based organizations remain front and center in any discussion of expanded learning for Latino students. Furthermore, NCLR has identified several critical elements that serve as a framework for establishing a comprehensive approach to developing effective ELO policies:

1. Require Expanded Learning Programs Serving ELL Students to Partner with Quality Community-Based Organizations

Given that CBOs can effectively connect with Latino families and have extensive knowledge about the communities they serve, there is much to be gained from allowing CBOs to fill their natural role between schools and families. Families whose children participate in out-of-school programming or whose children are in school for an extended day place enormous trust in the providers to ensure students are engaged, safe, and making the best use of their time. In addition, when describing their relationship with the school system, many Latino parents express distrust,[26] and they are less likely to enroll their children in an expanded learning program, thus denying children the opportunity to practice their skills and be involved in enrichment activities. To build trust between providers and families, allow programs to meet the needs of the community, and ensure Latino students have access to ELOs, policies and programs should support:

- Partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations
- Community involvement and local decision-making in the development of ELO programs
- Fiscal agency for community-based organizations that partner with school districts
- Effective outreach to Latino and ELL families and students, where interactions between staff and families are culturally and linguistically appropriate
- Tools for families to support their children's learning and success, such as bilingual written or interactive activities and regular progress reports

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2. Provide Academic Support and Targeted Services for ELLs

Legislation or policies must ensure that there is an infrastructure in place to provide support for students who need it most, especially those from low-income and limited-English-proficient families. Research shows that unequal learning opportunities during out-of-school time contribute to the achievement gap between Latinos and their White peers. To ensure high levels of academic achievement for Latino students, states and districts must ensure that expanded learning programs:

- Align with school curricula and objectives
- Integrate academics, enrichment, and skill development through hands-on experiences that make learning relevant and engaging
- Provide well-designed instruction, including English-language support for ELLs
- Offer joint professional development and training to ensure overall program quality; the focus should be on working with ELLs and increasing cultural and linguistic competency skills among staff
- Target schools with high numbers of ELLs
- Actively address the learning needs and interests of all types of students, especially those who may benefit from approaches and experiences not offered in the traditional classroom setting

3. Allocate Sufficient Resources To Expand Access and Drive High-Quality Programs

The ebb and flow of resources is rarely consistent, which makes long-term planning difficult for providers—especially for community-based programs. In such a volatile environment, programs are unable to expand or invest in improvements that would enhance their offerings for Latinos and ELLs. In order for CBOs to build high-quality programming for Latino students and lasting relationships with the communities they serve, considerations must be made to:

- Allot sufficient funding to expand programs to serve more Latino students
- Fund and disseminate research on effective practices for working with ELLs to ensure cost and program efficacy

Conclusion

Hispanic children need strong academic support in addition to culturally appropriate and relevant instruction—things not often found within the traditional school day. Expanded learning is a unique opportunity to connect with the Latino community at all levels, provide academic enrichment and language support, and engage parents in their children's education. Parents and advocates must be vocal about the use of resources in developing these programs in their neighborhoods. Community-based organizations are often best-suited for meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse populations and must continue to be a part of the expanded learning policy conversation to ensure the best outcomes for Hispanic children and ELLs—and it is crucial that they be integrated into expanded learning programs. Thus, every effort should be made to allow their continued involvement providing Latino children with ELOs.

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