

# Equitable Extended Learning Opportunities: Requirements and Components

Minnesota's lawmakers will need to fund quality, equitable extended learning opportunities (ELT) and provide educators the resources needed to start restoring and healing the collective trauma and learning disruptions students have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and other moments of social and civil unrest. Lawmakers must remember that we are only starting to understand the full scope of how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact a generation of students as well as educators working in our public schools. Thus, ELT and one-time infusions of funds are only a starting point, not the ultimate solution.

Any examination of learning loss and student well-being must both account for the past inequities that have been well documented while also acknowledging the new scope of the problems caused by the pandemic. COVID-19 is not the cause of systemic inequities in our public schools, and students have experienced a myriad of "learning disruptions" during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years that are not related to the pandemic.

There is much work to complete, but we know from the work of researchers that growth and improvement can happen rapidly if educators are given the needed funds and resources.

For the remainder of this document, we will use the abbreviation ELT to refer to equitable extended learning time opportunities for students. ELT "takes place before and after the typical school day and over summer vacation and other scheduled breaks and is one of the four pillars of a comprehensive community school strategy...while many schools offer after-school programs and weekend enrichment opportunities, these opportunities do not necessarily constitute ELT. Quality ELT is not just an add-on program, field trip, or enrichment opportunity; it complements the learning that takes place during the typical school day in ways that support essential curricular standards and the learning activities developed to achieve those standards" (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2020, p. 70).

## Guiding Values and Beliefs


We look to the following belief statements as immutable starting points that must guide the creation of equitable ELT opportunities in Minnesota:

- COVID-19 is not the cause of the inequities within the public school system; it is merely illuminating the problems we always knew existed. The pandemic is certainly intensifying the structural problems that disadvantage too many students, especially students of color, but neither it nor educators are to blame for all the academic setbacks students are experiencing (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2020, February).
- BIPOC and other marginalized communities have been disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and any interventions offered by the state must equitably fund the school sites that serve students from these populations. Educators and students in these districts will need additional resources to close the learning gaps that have been amplified by this pandemic.
- COVID-19 is not the only "disruption" facing students and educators. Any attempts to correct "learning loss" or the "COVID slide" will be secondary to social-emotional interventions that target the collective trauma students have experienced during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.
- Educators must be given the freedom to differentiate learning interventions for their unique populations of students. There is not a "one size fits all" path to building extended-learning programs.

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Updated: March 1, 2021

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- ELT programming is not a substitute for the important cultural knowledge and social learning that happens in all homes. White communities should no longer dictate what interventions work best for marginalized students. BIPOC families, single-parent families, and low socio-economic families build homes that are rich environments in which much is learned. Unfortunately, state metrics and benchmarks rarely measure the knowledge, cultural capital and community traditions that are passed down in families that are too often marginalized by our traditional systems.
- Public schools provide invaluable services to all communities, and it is unfortunate that it took a global pandemic and economic collapse for the public to recognize this reality. Now is the time to build more full-service community schools.
- Public educators, both teachers and education support professionals, have been undervalued and undercompensated for too long. We must reverse these trends if we hope to (1) stop educator attrition, (2) improve the emotional and physical well-being of educators, and (3) attract highly-qualified educators to the education profession.
- Collective bargaining in good faith is required and expected to achieve excellent teaching and learning conditions for educators and students in ELT programs. The state has a role to play in setting minimum standards that do not attempt to provide additional programming on the cheap. Individual problems and solutions, however, are best set when both districts and unions determine how ELT will look at the local level.

Minnesota lawmakers should not look to ELT as simply a way to restore learning loss caused by COVID-19; this is the time to transform all schools into spaces that equitably meet the needs of all children, regardless of their race, ability or home address.

### **Critical Inequities ELT Programming Must Address: Structural Racism, Divestment and Educator Compensation**

Education Minnesota released a paper in February 2021 titled *Disrupted Learning, COVID-19, and Public Education in Minnesota*. We encourage lawmakers to reference this document for a deeper understanding of the research behind ELT programming. In this section, we provide some startling findings about three inequities that must be immediately addressed through ELT programming in Minnesota.

#### **1. Structural Racism**

COVID-19 has disproportionately harmed BIPOC communities, and we can predict that BIPOC students will experience learning loss at disproportionate levels as compared to their white peers. As we have noted in previous documents, the pandemic coupled with the collective traumas felt by students from 2019-21 have exacerbated, accelerated and amplified the following concerning trends:

- BIPOC families have less access to high-speed internet and digital devices than white families. These structural inequities have dampened access to distance and hybrid learning opportunities.
- Most school districts offer ELT programs to help close opportunity gaps. Unfortunately, many of these programs were put on hold during the pandemic which further grows learning gaps in the state.
- Student truancy, a key indicator of success and graduation rates, has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Educator and student socio-emotional health is at an all-time low, and there has been an uptick in mental health-related hospitalizations and suicide attempts. This is especially true for BIPOC educators and students.
- The racial-wealth gap, especially the white-Black wealth gap, has grown during the pandemic.
- Linda Darling-Hammond (2020) and others have reported that the losses amplified by the pandemic “could last a lifetime and disproportionately impact Black and Latino/a students from low-income families” (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2020, p. 70).

## **2. Divestment from Public Education**

Lawmakers have chronically underfunded our schools creating “a racialized system of haves and have-nots. And underfunding has left teachers under-resourced and driven many out of our classrooms because these professionals simply do not have the tools to do their job effectively” (Educator Policy Innovation Center, May 2019). Underfunding has led to “a massive budgetary hole for schools, driving up class sizes, forcing districts to leave even basic building or structural repairs undone, and slashing support services that are critical to student success” (Educator Policy Innovation Center, May 2019). All problems facing public education can be directly tied to lack of resources and funds. Baker, Farrie, and Sciarra (2018) have confirmed that increased school financing by state governments “led to higher high school graduation rates, greater educational attainment, higher earnings, and lower rates of poverty in adulthood” (p. 1). Minnesota lawmakers must embrace the fact that “fair and equitable state finance systems must be at the center of efforts to improve educational outcomes and reduce stubborn achievement gaps among students” (p. 1). We should use this opportunity to build quality ELT programs that can guide our future decisions about how to continuously build equitable schools in Minnesota.

## **3. Educator Compensation**

Researchers have long documented the professional wage gap facing public educators, often referring to it as the “teacher pay penalty” or “ESP pay penalty.” Equitable compensation for educators is a depressingly complicated topic. We know most educators enter the profession for altruistic reasons, but lawmakers and district administrators have too often “preyed on the altruism of public educators by cutting salaries, slashing benefits, and creating financial problems that complicate the personal lives of our dedicated public educators” (Educator Policy Innovation Center, May 2019). Unfortunately, the compounding factors of decades of low compensation and an economic recession caused by a pandemic have left too many of Minnesota’s public educators in difficult financial situations. In addition, educators are reporting alarming rates of compassion fatigue and mental health problems. State lawmakers will need to account for these factors in any successful ELT programming design.

Our most qualified and experienced educators, teachers and ESPs, must be the professionals building the ELT programming needed to reverse learning loss and improve student mental health. Lawmakers should realize that:

- Many educators work “non-school” related jobs over summer vacation to fill the income gaps caused by government divestment from public education. Researchers with the PEW Research Center and the National Center for Education Statistics recently confirmed that summer employment, especially for new teachers, can account for 12% of an educator’s total annual earnings (Walker, 2019). Many of our educators are working in the summer, so they can afford to keep teaching during the academic year.
- Providing “within-the-school-system second jobs” can allow educators to grow personally while also remaining connected to their school sites. Garcia and Weiss (2019) have argued that providing educators with school based work opportunities outside of the traditional school day will help them “engage more deeply with their schools, reduce their personal stress levels, and build stronger academic programming.”

ELT programs built to address the learning losses caused by COVID-19 are not the solution to all compensation problems facing public educators, but they can be a starting point. Walker (2019) rightly argued that “the financial strain that compels teachers and education support professionals of all ages and experience levels to take on second, sometimes third jobs doesn’t subside after Labor Day.” However, this is a moment for Minnesota to start the process of closing the educator pay-gaps that plague the public school system. Our state’s required collective bargaining process can be a vehicle for that work.

## **The Path Forward: Requirements, Warnings and Questions**

Equitable ELT programs must be part of any effort to help students and educators heal and grow after the trauma caused by the pandemic and other learning disruptions. In the remainder of this document, we address how Minnesota should

move forward and use this opportunity to start repairing the damage that existed long before COVID-19. We will address (1) requirements, (2) examples of model programs, (3) short-term considerations and (4) educator compensation.

## Requirements

ELT programs must be designed for specific communities of students, so the programs designed for students in Bemidji, Minnesota will inevitably look different than programming for students in Farmington, Minnesota. However, there are six required components of all equitable ELT programs. Education Minnesota endorses ELT programs designed and operated in accordance with these six components.

- Extended learning programs **MUST** be designed and delivered by qualified, experienced educators, both teachers and non-licensed support staff. These educators must be compensated at a rate respectful of their expertise and labor, and they must be fully-versed in culturally-responsive teaching strategies. (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014, p. 10; Patall, Cooper, & Allen, 2010, p. 428)
- Student-teachers and new teachers **MAY** support the efforts of more experienced colleagues. These mentoring opportunities will benefit students and help stop teacher attrition. Students and new teachers **MUST NOT** be placed in charge of extended time programming. (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014, pp. 6, 16-17; EPIC, 2019 pp. 69-38; 184-185)
- Educators and districts **MUST** have the autonomy to design programs that meet the needs of their student populations. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach. (Patall, Cooper, & Allen, 2010, p. 432; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 21)
- Marginalized students, at-risk students, and BIPOC students **MUST** be prioritized and must be offered equitable access to extended-learning opportunities. (Patall, Cooper, & Allen, 2010, p. 432)
- Extended time programming **MUST** go beyond summer learning opportunities. (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007, p. 25)
- Educators **MUST** be given resources and funding otherwise these programs will not help close the opportunity gaps in Minnesota. (Kuhfield et al., May 2020, p. 27; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2000; Borman, Benson, & Overman, 2005, p. 133)

We also offer the following lists to further clarify what we consider non-negotiable components of equitable ELT programming.

### Equitable EL programs:

- ✓ support learning taking place in other settings (home, classroom, extracurricular activities).
- ✓ honor the professionalism of educators by granting them agency to build culturally-responsive programs for their students.
- ✓ embrace a growth-mindset by focusing on student acceleration.
- ✓ prioritize programming for BIPOC students, EL students, students from low-income homes, and students identified for special education services.
- ✓ embed socioemotional learning throughout the curriculum.
- ✓ challenge the limitations of the traditional school calendar by offering programming before school, after school, on weekends, and over breaks depending on the needs of students and communities .
- ✓ are led and directed by consistent, qualified educators both teachers and ESPs.
- ✓ prioritize students who are identified as falling behind grade-level expectations.
- ✓ are based in curricular standards.
- ✓ are culturally-responsive to the needs of the students.
- ✓ include opportunities for EL students to interact with native English speakers.
- ✓ offer instruction in English and the native language of non-English speaking students.

- ✓ are consistent, frequent and ongoing (including multi-year programming).
- ✓ consider the needs of the whole child including: physical health, nutrition, physical activity, mental health, socialization and academic growth.
- ✓ include program options for students birth to grade 12.
- ✓ honor the cultural knowledge and prior learning of students.
- ✓ offer time for services provided by counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, speech pathologists and special education teachers.
- ✓ offer enrichment in the arts and physical education.
- ✓ connect academic and social skills to real-world activities .
- ✓ offer both virtual and in-person options to meet the needs of specific students and provide students and families with the tools to access online resources (both high speed internet and devices).
- ✓ include support, training and consultation for parents and guardians.
- ✓ are free, universal, and include equitable transportation options.

### **Equitable ELT programs are NOT :**

- × one-time field trips.
- × summer camps.
- × expensive or cost-prohibitive.
- × remediation programs meant to repair perceived learning gaps and deficiencies .
- × solely focused on academics.
- × substitutes for classroom learning.
- × replacements for the cultural and social teachings that occur in homes.
- × new attempts to track students based on perceived ability or gifted status.
- × short, one-time enrichment programs.
- × tutoring programs to improve scores on standardized tests.

### **Model Programs**

There are several examples of quality ELT programs that embrace the principles we outlined at the start of this document. Oakland Unified School District's Full Service Community School Model, which is similar to the FSCS models in some Minnesota districts, embeds the comprehensive supports and collaboration efforts needed to build equitable ELT programs. The Oakland model "devotes special attention to providing integrated supports to students and fostering a school climate conducive to academic, social, and emotional learning." Lawmakers should study how this program includes interventions that "span in-school and out-of-school time." We applaud the Oakland model for including "students' families, to ensure that all students have the supports needed to be ready to learn and to develop the skills, habits, and mindsets that provide a foundation for academic and social success (Fehrer & Leos-Urbel, December 2015, p. 1).

In addition, the Freedom Schools program established by the Children's Defense Fund utilizes school and community stakeholder partnerships to provide equitable ELT programming. The Freedom Schools program "provides summer and after-school enrichment through a research-based and multicultural program model that supports K-12 scholars and their families through five essential components: high quality academic and character-building enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational servant leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health" (Children's Defense Fund, 2021).

Finally, we draw lawmakers attention to the 2012 report released by the National Education Association Foundation titled *Expanding Learning Opportunities to Close the Achievement Gaps: Lessons from Union-District Collaborations*. The authors of the report highlight three examples of union and district administration joint efforts “to design, implement and sustain high-quality ELOs” (National Education Association Foundation, April 2012, p. 7). These three programs include:

- The Summer Dreamers Academy, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- The Hasboro Summer Learning Initiative, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, MA
- The Kuss Middle School Model, Fall, River, MA

All three models have helped close opportunity gaps for students enrolled in the programs. The local unions and school leaders in each of these examples combined “traditional reform efforts—including standards-setting, curriculum reviews and professional development—with student-centered efforts, extended learning time, and summer learning and afterschool programs, schools and districts are finding a powerful combination of approaches to help close the achievement gaps. Teachers and unions are playing a critical role in shaping these ELOs for young people” (National Education Association Foundation, April 2012, p. 20). These three models show how district leaders and state lawmakers can work in partnership with educator unions to empower teachers and ESPs to “close the achievement gaps in our schools” (National Education Association Foundation, April 2012, p. 7).

### **Short-Term Considerations**

Minnesota must embrace a long-term approach to recovering from the inequities that have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are some actions that must be prioritized before longer strategic planning can take place. Lawmakers and stakeholders looking for information about long-term considerations should consult our EPIC paper *Disrupted Learning, COVID-19, and Public Education in Minnesota* for more information on how to approach post-COVID recovery.

There are a few aspects of ELT programming that must take priority in the strategic plans written by districts. They include:

1. Students and educators need a break from school. ELT programming will fall flat if the state expects students and educators to transition from the traditional school year to summer programming in the span of 24 hours. Districts must be given the leeway to embed much needed breaks within the ELT programs they design.
2. All students have experienced disruptions brought by COVID-19, but some communities have bore disproportionate amounts of trauma. Minnesota already had tremendous opportunity gaps before the pandemic, and we fear they will only increase if interventions are not offered now. We embrace the findings of Darling Hammond (2020) and her colleagues who have argued “ELT is especially beneficial for students from low-income families, students of color, and students who are academically behind” (p. 71). These populations of students must be prioritized in the state’s early efforts to reform and improve ELT offerings.
3. English learners will also need to be prioritized in ELT offerings. Many EL students only hear and speak English when physically inside a school building. Distance and hybrid learning have decreased the amount of time these students have spent practicing English. Thus, we support Darling Hammond and her colleagues call that EL students will need “targeted language instruction (preferably in both English and their primary language) to catch up, as well as regular opportunities to be mixed with other students” (p. 71).
4. Tutoring will be most likely be part of most ELT programs. Peer tutoring and tutoring provided by students from advanced grades are excellent interventions but they ARE NOT substitutes for instruction provided by licensed, qualified educators. Researchers have directly stated:
  - Effective tutoring is accomplished not by a cadre of ever-changing, untrained volunteers, but by a focused group of trained individuals working consistently with individuals or small groups of students. In particular, research supports high-dosage tutoring in which tutors work consistently every day for full class sessions (during or after



school) with students one-to-one or in very small groups, often accomplishing large gains in relatively short periods of time. (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2020, p. 72)

Tutoring is important, but it is not the only intervention needed at this moment.

5. Minnesota faces a teacher attrition problem. Mentoring is one of the primary means districts can use to keep new teachers in the education field. ELT programming is the ideal moment to pair veteran and new teachers, so they can collaboratively build programming for their students. This will not only ensure quality of the ELT programming, but it will also allow newer teachers to learn and grow in their professions.
6. Many educators will need additional professional development to continue improving the ELT offerings in their districts. The state will need to fund the training and learning educators need to build quality ELT programs.

## Compensation for Educators

Non-licensed and licensed educators who are part of extended time programming either in the midst or aftermath of the pandemic require fair and professional compensation. Remuneration should be considered both in the form of economic provisions and working conditions supportive to educators.

The State of Minnesota MUST take action to ensure appropriate minimum compensation floors are set for all districts providing extended time programming. Bargaining above and beyond the state's standards for compensation is required under the Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA), but it is critical that the state acknowledge through policy that an across-the-board standard for employment is expected for those who work an extended school year especially under the working conditions created by the pandemic.

We recommend the following state-provided guardrails on compensation provisions accompanied by guidance that funding from federal relief legislation can be used for any of the following:

- Hourly rates for licensed educators MUST be based not on minimum compensation standards or beginning teacher rates but rates commensurate with experienced teachers' hourly rates of pay.
  - *For example, a requirement that pay is based on the Masters, Step 10 lane of a local salary schedule or the teachers' daily rate of pay, whichever is higher.*
- Hourly rates for non-licensed educators MUST be based on family-supporting wages, such as \$20 per hour or the employee's daily rate of pay, whichever is higher.
- Employers SHOULD have the option to offer service credit towards TRA or PERA for all additional time worked; this would require statutory changes to permit more than one year of service credit to be earned during one year of employment.
- Employees working an extended contract MUST be provided with free child care for all staff. This will require action by the Legislature.
- Employers MUST provide additional contributions toward: (1) retirement savings plans such as 403(b) arrangements, (2) repayment of student loans through 127(a) Education Assistance Programs and/or (3) health care savings accounts or health care reimbursement arrangements at the request of the employee.

Where employees in extended learning programs are retirees or student teachers, the state MUST issue guidance on the following compensation provisions:

- Districts should pay the full amount of retirees' healthcare contributions.
- Retirees should be allowed to earn both salary and pension credit during their period of extended time service. This would require legislative action.
- Districts should provide additional student teaching credit for aspiring educators and pair them with experienced teachers to ensure that both students enrolled in extended programs and teacher candidates have the best possible learning experience.

- Student teachers should earn a professional wage while teaching in extended programming.
  - *For example, the state should require that student teachers earn at least the hourly rate of pay that teachers at BA, Step 1 earn.*

We recommend that the state provide guidance on necessary teaching and learning conditions that are supportive to students and staff alike. For extended learning to be successful, investments in the learning environment will be as important in attracting and retaining students and staff as compensation provisions. The details of these programs, based on state requirements, must be negotiated pursuant to PELRA.

- Non-licensed staff should be provided an option for a full extended year contract to eliminate the need for employees to seek patchwork employment over the summer.
- Extended time programming must be paired with additional preparation time to ensure that plans are targeted to student need.
- Licensed staff should be provided options around team-teaching to cover contracted assignments and allow maximum flexibility both for their own schedules and to accommodate large- and small-group instruction.
- Both licensed and non-licensed staff should be offered CEUs in support of licensure or other credentialing in recognition of the planning and curriculum development that goes on during an extended school year.

We recommend that the state issue any guidance with firm requirements around the documentation of expenditures to ensure that minimum employment standards are being met. We further recommend that anything above and beyond the minimum standards set by the state for the use of funds in compensating employees also include a requirement that districts prove that they have bargained in good faith with employee unions; we also recommend that the state withhold funding for districts that fail to comply with this standard.

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