

Policy, Partnership and Progress: Expanding Learning Opportunities in Connecticut

A CASE STUDY

Sharon Deich
Heather Clapp Padgette
Sarah Pitcock
Meghan Neary

Cross & Joftus, LLC



Hartford Foundation
FOR PUBLIC GIVING

Together for good.™

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the generous support and guidance provided by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and The Ford Foundation, the sponsors of this case study. A special thanks goes to Sara Sneed, Director of Education Investments with the Hartford Foundation, who provided guidance, thoughtful feedback, and important context throughout the development of the paper. We also wish to thank the many individuals across Connecticut who shared their time, expertise and insights as we researched and developed our findings (see the Appendix on page 34 for a complete listing).

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving provides more than \$32.6 million a year in grants and other support to a broad range of nonprofit organizations and school districts. It also helps donors make effective charitable giving decisions and brings individuals together to find creative solutions to important community issues. The Hartford Foundation is one of the largest community foundations in the nation, the largest funder in its region, a leader among peers in the state, and it has a significant impact on its grantees and the community.

In 2013, the Foundation named education a strategic institutional priority and established goals to ensure that children from birth through age 18 are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten and prepared to succeed when they graduate from high school. This decision builds on and leverages the Foundation's longstanding commitment and experience in promoting children's healthy development and educational opportunity through such investments as the Hartford Community Schools Initiative, Hartford Partnership for School Success, Brighter Futures Initiative, and Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative.

The Foundation's current education investments are focused on bringing greater equity and opportunity to children and youth throughout Greater Hartford. Its strategy is to build the capacity of seven of Connecticut's highest need school districts as each develops policies and practices

to support student success through increased family, school and community partnership (FSCP). The Foundation's approach is fourfold: (1) supporting the development of school district, family and community leaders who are committed to family, school and community partnership; (2) facilitating the growth of a diverse FSCP learning community; (3) providing grants to support demonstrations of districts' changed practice, and (4) pursuing related change in public policy and school districts' fiscal practices.

The Ford Foundation's More and Better Learning Time Initiative

Across eight decades, the Ford Foundation has invested in innovative ideas, visionary individuals, and frontline institutions advancing human dignity around the world. The foundation is guided by a vision of social justice – a world in which all individuals, communities, and peoples work toward the protection and full expression of their human rights; are active participants in the decisions that affect them; share equitably in the knowledge, wealth, and resources of society; and are free to achieve their full potential. The foundation's mission is to reduce poverty and injustice, strengthen democratic values, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement.

Launched in 2011, the Ford Foundation's More and Better Learning Time Initiative (MBLTI) aimed "to make effective expanded learning time the new normal across American schools, especially in under-served communities." The Foundation's grant making approach was multi-layered and included deep investments in six cities—Rochester (NY), Newark (NJ), Chicago (IL), Detroit (MI), Denver (CO) and Los Angeles (CA)—as well as support for state-level efforts in Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Tennessee.

The Ford Foundation's theory of change posited that transforming education systems requires multiple stakeholders engaged in developing ideas along with compelling evidence to shape public policy discussions. Through MBLTI, the Foundation supported advocacy "from the grassroots to the grass-tops" to build the public support and political will needed to develop and sustain expanded-learning reforms and associated policy change.

I. Introduction

For decades, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (Hartford Foundation) has invested in improved education opportunities for children and youth. Over the years, Foundation initiatives have shifted from a largely programmatic focus toward a focus on educational equity and systemic change, particularly, changes in school districts' perspectives, policies and practices concerning family, school and community partnership (FSCP) and how such partnership can support student learning and student success. The Foundation engages multiple partners both in developing its strategies and in demonstrating educational systems' transformation. It also is committed to its own and others' continuous learning and improvement, while developing actionable knowledge for the field.

The Hartford Foundation was a natural partner for Ford, supporting the activity of the Connecticut TIME Collaborative, a partnership of national, state and local organizations that drove planning and implementation for MBLTI statewide.

In 2013, the Hartford Foundation's learnings and commitments prompted its adoption of a new fourfold strategy to strengthen educators, families and communities' capacity to work together to make decisions, establish policies, allocate resources and develop student supports, including students' voices wherever possible. Centering all related activity in some of Connecticut's highest need Alliance Districts (see pages 12 and 24 for more info), the Foundation has since provided considerable support to strengthen family, school and community partnerships integral to broader district and school improvement efforts. In particular, its aim is to facilitate the development of partnerships that measurably increase students' learning opportunities.

As the Hartford Foundation was reimagining its approach, the Ford Foundation was setting its sights on a new effort to ensure more and better educational opportunities for the nation's most vulnerable students. To address the challenges of the 21st century, Ford believed that schools needed more time to meet many demands—attain increasingly high standards, implement rigorous and innovative curricula, allow teachers to collaborate and use data to understand individual learning needs, make effective use of technology, and provide students with a balanced, well-rounded education. Yet, schools often were shackled to outdated and outmoded time frames and structures that forced difficult choices among these goals, particularly in the nation's lowest-achieving schools and poorest neighborhoods.

In 2011, in an effort to create the space for innovation and collaboration in schools, the Ford Foundation launched a national initiative to promote the redesign of the traditional school day and year. The More and Better Learning Time Initiative (MBLTI), which operated through 2016, provided support to states, school districts, community organizations, advocates, researchers and technical support organizations across the country to promote, support and test innovative school schedules. Ford sought to promote efforts to significantly increase the amount of learning time for students (by 20-30 percent) through lengthening and redesigning the school day or school year to improve the way time is used for both students and teachers.

In 2012, the Hartford Foundation joined forces with the Ford Foundation to serve as Ford's "on-the-ground" partner in Connecticut. With its like-minded focus on improving educational equity and outcomes, especially for low-income students, the Hartford Foundation was a natural partner for Ford, supporting the activity of the Connecticut TIME Collaborative, a partnership of national, state and local organizations that drove planning and implementation for the MBLTI statewide.

In 2015, the Ford Foundation began to sunset the MBLTI. However, to ensure that the lessons learned from the initiative and the TIME Collaborative would continue to help

inform local and state policy and practice around expanded learning, the Ford Foundation requested that the Hartford Foundation document the local, state and federal policies related to expanded learning time in Connecticut and how both changing policy and practice is affecting the growth and sustainability of expanded learning.

About this Case Study

This case study captures the current state of expanded learning in Connecticut. As such, its aim is to inform the work of state, district, philanthropic, and other leaders both in and outside of the state who are interested in undertaking or supporting an expanded learning agenda. A longer day and the work spurred by the MBLTI and Hartford Foundation investments are two pieces of a larger story of expanded learning in Connecticut that involves diverse school districts and a wide range of community partners.

The study is based on extensive conversations with staff at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and interviews with over 30 state government officials, state education support organizations, advocacy groups, state and local funders, local school and district staff, and community-based organizations (see Appendix), as well as a review of relevant district, state and federal education programs and policies. While it initially focused on documenting policy and practice related to a longer school day, it quickly became clear that a longer school day is just one part of a broader mosaic of expanded learning opportunities in Connecticut.

Districts in Connecticut are exploring a broad range of expanded learning opportunities (ELOs) and, in many cases, with the support of the Hartford Foundation, implementing them with community-based partners and other stakeholders, particularly parents. Accordingly, data gathered as a part of this study expanded over time to include information on a variety of ELOs that the state, districts, philanthropy and community-based organizations are developing across Connecticut.

Understanding the national and state contexts in which ELOs have operated since 2011 also is critical for understanding the lessons learned from ELOs in general and in Connecticut specifically. As in other parts of the country, the state's slow

DEFINING EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In their broadest sense, ELOs include all student learning-centered programs and other resources offered children and youth before, during and after school and year round, above and beyond the instructional programs provided during the traditional school day. In Connecticut, this includes everything from literacy programs offered by summer camps to community schools' academic enrichment programs and experiential learning "internships" created by local corporations in partnership with neighborhood schools, as just a sampling. Some are funded by public entities—usually schools and city agencies—and others are supported by community-based and/or private organizations as well as philanthropic partners.

This case study focuses on a specific subset of ELOs: district and school initiatives that provide additional, structured learning opportunities for students outside the traditional school day, week or year. These ELOs are aimed at improving student academic achievement, preventing learning loss, and reducing achievement or opportunity gaps. They include efforts to formally lengthen the school day or year, as well as voluntary before- and after-school programs, summer learning opportunities and ELOs offered as part of a community-school approach.¹ While other types of social, recreational and enrichment opportunities also are important features of the landscape of activities and supports available to children and youth, these ELOs fall outside the focus of this scan.

¹ In Connecticut, community schools are public schools that have partnerships with multiple agencies and organizations to provide services and supports for students and families, including social services, mental and physical health, and adult education.

recovery from the 2008 recession has led to a downturn in education funding. At the same time, an increase in the number of low-income families in the state has sparked increased concern about educational equity. In Connecticut, rising competition from magnet schools as well as reliance on expiring turnaround dollars also impact the ELO landscape.

To distill those key factors, this case study begins with a scan of the national and state contexts for ELOs, including relevant federal and state policies and programs, political and fiscal conditions, and discussions of the role of philanthropy. It then takes a deeper look at the Hartford Foundation’s education strategy and MBLTI in Connecticut. To highlight key federal, state and district policies in action, three profiles of district ELO initiatives that have received support from the Hartford Foundation and/or the Connecticut TIME Collaborative are included. An additional profile, showing another aspect of how school-community partners are expanding learning, helps to demonstrate the breadth of approaches across the state. The graphic below provides a visual overview of the paper and shows the relationship between the various policies and programs that impact the local ELO environment.

District profiles include:

- **Meriden Public Schools:** Adopted a longer school day to provide students with more time for learning and teachers with more time to collaborate.
- **Bloomfield Public Schools:** Initially added enhanced summer programs for all students in grades K-12 and is currently adopting a longer school day.
- **Hartford Public Schools:** Embraced a community-school strategy to provide a broad array of services and supports, including ELOs, for students and families.

Also included is a description of the **Coalition for New Britain’s Youth**, which provides an example of how a network of nonprofit community-based organizations is expanding access to high-quality after-school and summer program.

The study concludes with a discussion of key themes (p. 30) and a set of recommendations (p. 32) to support future growth of ELOs.

The Shaping of Expanded Learning Opportunities in Connecticut



Case Study Preview: Key Themes and Recommendations

Conversations with Connecticut leaders and stakeholders unearthed several important themes related to the success and sustainability of ELOs.

>> In Connecticut, as elsewhere, federal and state policies, priorities and resources are shaping the development and expansion of ELOs.

“At CSDE, we believe that extending time for learning can be a great lever for reform.”

– Commissioner Dianna Wentzell, Connecticut State Department of Education

“We try to get districts and schools to see that these types of supportive services—expanded learning and expanded time—are foundational to student success. It’s always challenging to determine what’s central to teaching and learning and what’s supportive... But there’s a recognition that it all fits.”

– Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut State Department of Education

“[State] Alliance funding gave us the boost that enabled us to launch our summer program and our extended day, both of which have been a big factor in our district’s success.”

– Superintendent James Thompson, Bloomfield Public Schools

>> Funding is the biggest obstacle to the growth and sustainability of ELOs.

“We are very much trying to preserve the [state] Alliance funding and supports. We know that it’s been a key resource for districts to implement expanded learning opportunities and other critical supports.”

– Desi Nesmith, Chief of Turnaround, Connecticut State Department of Education

“If we had the resources, I’d tell you that within five years all eight elementary schools in the district would have an extended day. You’re seeing other districts give up on these programs. I can’t give up on results this good.”

– Superintendent Mark Benigni, Meriden Public Schools

>> ELOs continue to evolve to meet the needs of schools and families and the availability of resources in districts.

“We started the program with 4th and 5th grade, but once we started to look at 3rd grade reading and chronic absence, we knew we had to start earlier.”

– Maria Sanchez, American Savings Foundation

“When schools began offering before- and after-school care, it was often provided by outside organizations and program activities were developed independently so there was no expectation of linking to the school day. Now, more and more schools see ELOs as an opportunity to support student learning and address gaps in achievement.”

– Patrice Nelson, Connecticut Center for School Change

>> In Connecticut, local and national philanthropy have played a key role in the growth of ELOs.

“By joining forces, the Hartford Foundation and Ford were able to support ELO development at different levels of the system, and from both inside and outside the system. Hartford served as a grant-maker, convener, trusted partner, and thought leader building local ownership and embedding MBLTI ideas and approaches in local agendas and contexts. Ford provided some strategic direction, catalytic funding, and links to networks that linked local and state work to a broader national conversation.”

– Sanjiv Rao, Ford Foundation

>> Districts are choosing to involve community partners to create a broader and richer experience for students.

“Early on, we found we needed to provide extra training and support to our partners to help them develop their skills around classroom management. It became an annual thing and everyone learned a lot. Now, some of our partner staff have become certified teachers.”

– Principal Dan Coffey, Pulaski Elementary School, Meriden Public Schools

“As a network of community schools, we’ve really been leveraging our ability to convene a broad group of community-based organizations to test and incubate new ideas for the district, supporting student learning and success.”

– Tauheedah Jackson, Hartford Partnership for Student Success, Hartford Public Schools

>> Many stakeholders in Connecticut are working to create a more equitable system of education.

“In Hartford, as across the nation, if we can find our way to engender an increased public will to support public education, it likely will be because we have wrestled with and developed strategies to dismantle the historic underpinnings of inequity. At the Hartford Foundation, we believe that this wrestling and strategy development must be the undertaking of the entire community. That’s why we believe so deeply in family, school and community partnership. It’s one pragmatic and authentic way to further equity in public schools.”

– Sara Sneed, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

“We mapped the connection between unemployment and single-parent households to show the community why they need to worry about equity in afterschool and childcare.”

– Robin Lamott Sparks, Coalition for New Britain’s Youth

>> Stakeholder support and commitment from state and district leadership are critical to the long-term success of any ELO.

“To keep these efforts going, it’s really critical to have broad community support. When it comes from top down, it’s much harder. Stakeholders from across the community need to be brought in to these efforts early. Without that support, it’s impossible to maintain.”

– Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Connecticut After School Network

Recommendations

Connecticut’s story includes many lessons that can be instructive for foundations and other entities that are supporting ELOs.

- 1) Make a long-term commitment.** Systems change requires long-term support—districts and partners need sufficient time and resources to refine their efforts and determine how to sustain them over time.
- 2) Set a table for stakeholders.** Foundations and other intermediary organizations can provide a neutral territory on which community providers and state and district leaders can come together to spur alignment and centralize essential functions, creating capacity that providers struggle to afford.
- 3) Map the state policy landscape.** Foundations and others can support efforts to map the available funding and policy landscape and develop shared priorities in the field for aligning and strengthening policies.
- 4) Understand the national context.** As new state plans are drafted and considered under ESSA, funders and others interested in supporting ELOs should stay connected to news on how the law is being implemented and what it might mean for the expanded learning field.
- 5) Capture your knowledge and learn from others.** Develop a plan for knowledge management at the outset of your ELO effort that includes both internal and external capture and dissemination opportunities. Don’t reinvent the wheel.

II. National Context

Nationally, education policy and practice are being shaped by several overarching trends related to changing demographics and the devolution of decision making to the states. While public sentiment and policies have implications for education more broadly, they also present specific opportunities and challenges for ELOs. These include:

The strong and growing sentiment that our current education system does not equitably distribute its resources and that those who need the most often get the least. A robust body of literature supports the idea that students attending schools with a high proportion of low-income students often have fewer resources and opportunities for learning and support than their more affluent peers. It also shows how opportunity and achievement gaps are inextricably linked and must be addressed in tandem to promote success.² This research also tells us that:

- ELOs can make a significant impact on the educational achievement gap and help students achieve their full academic potential.³
- ELOs can be successful in “transforming” or “turning around” schools that are consistently under-performing. For students who need extra support to succeed academically, what happens before and after the school day can be as important as what happens during the school day.⁴
- ELOs boost personal and social development, especially for low-income children.⁵
- High-quality ELOs provided in partnership with community organizations have been found to improve educational outcomes and promote community development.⁶

An unusually long downturn in state and local education funding. Most states, including Connecticut, are spending less on education than before the 2008 recession, and many have reduced education funding by 10 percent or more.⁷ Many local governments have also reduced funds, putting additional strain on district budgets.⁸ This means that states and districts have few resources available for testing new strategies unless they are cost-neutral or supported by dedicated funding. As one Connecticut state official reported, “With the Great Recession, you are coming up with poverty in more places so the funds we do have are getting spread even more thinly.”

² Auger, A., Pierce, K. M. and Vandell, D. L. (April, 2013). Participation in Out-of-School Settings and Student Academic and Behavioral Outcomes. Unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/>

³ The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2006). Extended Learning and Development Opportunities. The Council of Chief State School Officers, 1-4.

⁴ National Education Policy and Practice Department. (2008). Closing the Gap Through Extended Learning Opportunities. National Education Association, 1-4.

⁵ Durlak, J. & Weissberg P. (2007). The Impact of After-School Programs that Promote Personal and Social Skills. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 1-50.

⁶ Henig, J. R., et al. (2015). Pulling Collective Impact in Context: A Review of the Literature on Local Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Education. Teachers College, Columbia University, (pp. 1-90), National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group. (2009). Recommendations for Federal Policy. National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, 1-4.

⁷ <http://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/most-states-have-cut-school-funding-and-some-continue-cutting>

⁸ Ibid.

Federal Education Policy

The convergence of these two factors—a focus on equity and fewer resources in the states—has helped to fuel federal investments and a national philanthropic movement that promotes ELOs.

The national education agenda is largely driven by federal investments in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The recent reauthorization of this act—known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—squarely emphasizes a need to promote equity and a more holistic approach to student learning, opening the door for new approaches to addressing the opportunity gap.⁹ It also offers many opportunities to support expanded learning. A new evidence-based requirement means that ELOs with strong research bases will be the best candidates for funding.

The ESSA law has 10 Titles (sections), four of which are most relevant for ELOs:¹⁰

ESSA: Title I, Part A Often referred to simply as “Title I,” this is the largest federally-funded elementary and secondary (K–12) education program. Originally established in 1965, Title I provides supplemental funds to ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on state assessments. Funds are targeted to schools with the highest concentration of economically disadvantaged students for the purpose of promoting student achievement, staff development, and parental and community involvement. Title I can support a variety of interventions including ELOs. Many after-school and summer school programs as well as community schools rely on Title I funds.

ESSA: Title II Focused on providing resources for educators’ professional learning, this program includes opportunities for joint professional development among teachers and ELO staff as well as funding for literacy interventions such as “connecting out-of-school learning opportunities to in-school learning in order to support children’s literacy achievement.”

ESSA DEFINITION OF EXPANDED LEARNING TIME

As defined by sec. 8002 of ESSA, “the term ‘expanded learning time’ means using a longer school day, week or year schedule to significantly increase the total number of school hours to include additional time for: a) activities and instruction for enrichment as part of a well-rounded education and b) instructional and support staff to collaborate, plan and engage in professional development (including professional development on family and community engagement) within and across grades and subjects.”

TITLE I AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT UNDER ESSA

In 2010, with a significant boost in funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Title I was expanded to include School Improvement Grants (SIG) that provided focused support to the country’s “persistently lowest achieving schools.” SIG funds were allocated to states via formula. Districts then competitively bid for funds to implement reforms meeting their state’s eligibility criteria. In 2016, Connecticut had \$3.8 million in federal SIG funding, with district grants averaging \$391,000 per year for 3–5 years. Two districts noted in this case study, New Britain and Bloomfield, used SIG funds to help launch their ELOs. While SIG is no longer a standalone Title I program under ESSA, the law requires states to increase the amount they set aside to support their lowest-achieving schools from 4 percent of their total allocation to 7 percent. This requirement means that school improvement could still provide an important source of funding for ELOs. In Connecticut, a state official indicated that, for now, “[a]s a policy, the state will continue to provide funding for grantees that are in the middle of their SIG grants—we’ve made a commitment.”

⁹ <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/ESSAAdvancingEquityThroughESSA101316.pdf>
<https://edtrust.org/event/essa-boot-camp/>

¹⁰ This section draws from three primary resources: <http://www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NLSLA-ESSA-guide-for-state-level-stakeholders.pdf>; <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/ESSA-Opportunities-for-Afterschool.pdf>; and <https://www.principals.org/advocacy/essa-toolkit/essa-facts-sheets/title-iv%E2%80%941st-century-schools?SSO=true>

ESSA: Title III The Title III program provides targeted supports for English Learners (ELs). In several places, this section of the law calls out community-based organizations as key partners for EL supports, and community engagement is referenced as a means for helping families better connect to schools so they can provide support for their children’s learning. Title III also allows for CBO staff to be included in professional development.

ESSA: Title IV Title IV consolidates many previously separate funding sources and includes three important parts for ELOs:

Title IV, Part A, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants provides a wide array of supports necessary for a “well-rounded education” and calls for “coordination with community-based services and programs.”

Title IV, Part B, 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC) is the largest federal funding stream for after-school, before-school and summer programs. 21CCLC funds can be used to support extended learning activities if these activities: (1) add a minimum of 300 additional hours of programming each school year, (2) ensure programming be supplemental in nature and not an extension or addition to regular school-day activities, and (3) require partners.

Title IV, Part F, Community Support for School Success authorizes the Promise Neighborhoods and Full Service Community Schools discretionary grant programs. The definition of a “full service community school” includes “out-of-school-time programs and strategies.”

While ESSA is adding energy to the debate over how to best address inequities in our education systems and structures, many uncertainties related to ESSA implementation exist.¹² As of the writing of this report, many state plans were not yet approved, and long-term funding for several ESSA provisions, especially those focused on supporting a more holistic approach to learning, remain uncertain based on the Trump administration’s proposed budget. How ESSA plays out, especially when it comes to its focus on equity, could have significant implications for the growth and sustainability of ELOs.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT GRANTS (SSAEG): FLEXIBLE FUNDING FOR ELOS

This block grant consolidates several smaller programs and adds a few new options to the mix. Its funding will generally be distributed to districts based on the Title I formula.¹¹ The SSAEG program has three components: well-rounded educational opportunities; safe and healthy students; and effective use of technology. Districts are required to spend at least 20 percent of their SSAEG funds in both the “well-rounded education” and the “safe and healthy students” categories. At least some funds must be set aside for technology. The SSAEG program provides districts with a significant amount of flexibility in how they spend these federal dollars. SSAEG was authorized at \$1.6 billion, but only \$400 million was appropriated for FY2017 (providing an estimated \$3.4 million to Connecticut). While this program will initially provide a relatively small amount of funding to the state, it is unclear how it will fare in future budget negotiations.

21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS: THE ONLY FEDERAL SOURCE DEDICATED TO ELOS

The 21st Century Community Learning Center program (21CCLC), originally established in 1994, has inspired the growth of many after-school and summer programs across the country and paved the way for state funding to provide additional support. 21CCLC was designed as a seed program, providing funding for schools to establish community learning centers that offer academic enrichment opportunities outside of regular school hours to students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. In Connecticut, 21CCLC grants are awarded for five years with funds being reduced to 75 percent and then 50 percent of the original award amount in grant years four and five to encourage districts to identify alternative sources of funding to sustain programming. Under ESSA’s precursor, states could request to use a portion of their 21CCLC grant to support a longer school day, and, for a short period, several districts in Connecticut did so. Under ESSA, states will continue to have the option to reserve a portion of their grants to support a longer school day or year.

¹¹ Because the FY2017 appropriation for this grant was significantly lower than originally expected, states will be permitted to hold a one-time competition to distribute FY2017 funds.

¹² <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/05/31/our-schools-have-an-equity-problem-what.html>

National Philanthropic Investments

The growth of ELOs in Connecticut mirrors a national movement to provide more and better opportunities for learning, especially for students who are struggling in school. Philanthropic investments made by the Hartford Foundation and the Ford Foundation, among others, have played a critical role in the growth of ELOs.

In addition to the Ford Foundation, the Wallace Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation have anchored national investments in ELOs that have benefitted Connecticut.

Since 2003, The Wallace Foundation has invested in a portfolio of work to support the development of a city after-school systems building, coordinating the work of municipal agencies, schools, nonprofit youth programs and other institutions. Stakeholders from New Britain, for instance, credit their attendance at a Wallace-funded system-building conference with spurring cross-sector collaboration and data sharing around after-school and summer. The Wallace Foundation also supported five districts across the country to expand traditional summer school and funds many organizations that support program and policy development, such as the American Youth Policy Forum, the Afterschool Alliance, the National Summer Learning Association and the Coalition for Community Schools. These efforts have helped to build the capacity and knowledge of school districts and provider organizations across the country, including ELOs in Connecticut and the entire expanded-learning field.

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has also bolstered the growth and development of ELOs in Connecticut and across the country by supporting the roll out of the 21CCLC initiative and funding statewide after-school networks across the country. These networks, now in all 50 states, offer important opportunities to galvanize key decision makers—from governors to parents—around the issue of expanding high-quality after-school programs. The Connecticut Afterschool Network was one of the first state networks funded and continues to provide critical training, policy analysis and advocacy support to ELO stakeholders statewide. The significant and sustained investments made by these foundations have helped to leverage public resources for ELOs at the federal, state and local levels.

Their investments have also added to a growing knowledge base that can be used to expand high-quality ELOs. In addition, many other foundations, including the Open Society Foundations, JCPenney Foundation, MetLife Foundation and the William T. Grant Foundation, have provided funding to support local programming, conduct research and evaluations, and improve the quality of ELOs.

III. Connecticut Context

While federal policy and national philanthropic investments help to create a frame and momentum for ELOs, state policy and practice directly influence the shape of ELOs across Connecticut. To understand how state policy and practice have contributed to the growth of ELOs in Connecticut, it is important to consider several issues that frame Connecticut's education landscape—the 2012 education reform law, historic and ongoing equity lawsuits and the impact of remedies, the state budget climate, the state's philosophy of local control over education and the specific policies that impact the provision of ELOs. Because ELO expansion is closely tied to resource availability, the state and federal funding sources that are most often used for ELOs in the state are also described here.

The 2012 landmark state education reform law established many of the reforms and funding streams that have provided support for the growth of ELOs in the state. For many years, Connecticut had been viewed as a national leader in education, but by the early 2000s, state stakeholders began to realize it had lost its edge. In fact, a 2011 report showed that Connecticut's achievement gap was the worst in the country, which galvanized policymakers towards the passage of a wide-ranging education bill.¹³ The 2012 state education reform package spearheaded by Governor Malloy passed with bipartisan support and embraced a set of “key principles,” including providing additional support for the state's lowest-performing schools and districts; expanding the availability of high-quality school models (including charters and magnets); removing barriers to success to allow innovation; and delivering more resources to the districts with the greatest needs. Baked into the law were seven evidence-based strategies for improving student achievement, including expanded learning opportunities. The law's \$140 million Alliance District program, the largest grant source available to eligible districts over and above their state foundational funding, was made available to Connecticut's 30 lowest-performing districts. Alliance funds could be used to support ELOs. The Commissioner's Network, another new program established in 2012, targeted

the 25 lowest-performing schools in the state and also included ELOs as an option for schools to pursue.

Competition for students is helping to fuel the growth of ELOs as traditional school districts look to offer the kind of curricular enhancements and expanded learning opportunities that are available in magnet and charter schools across the state. In the *Sheff v. O'Neill* school desegregation lawsuit, decided over 20 years ago, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the racial and socio-economic isolation of Hartford students violated their basic constitutional rights to equal educational opportunity. In 1997, the state legislature passed several initiatives to address the court ruling, including the current voluntary, cross-district integration effort, which included a new regional magnet structure and an expanded inter-district transfer system, now known as “open choice.”

The Hartford area currently has 45 inter-district magnet schools attended by approximately 20,000 students residing in Hartford and surrounding communities. The long-term impacts of the *Sheff* decision are many, but one key result is that many suburban districts find themselves in a competition for students (and ultimately state funding) with these newer and comparably well-resourced magnet schools, along with a growing number of charter schools.

Stakeholders from Connecticut's Capitol Region Education Council, one of Connecticut's Regional Education Service Centers and the operator of many charter schools in the area, indicated that originally all of its magnet schools had a longer day, but that over time, as funding became tighter, many have gone back to traditional school schedules. Today, only eight of its schools have a longer day.

A recent lawsuit could help to fuel the growth of ELOs as a remedy to inequities in the state's education funding formula. In *Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) v. Rell*, the Connecticut Superior Court ruled that Connecticut “has no

¹³ https://www.cga.ct.gov/ed/tfs/20110708_Achievement%20Gap%20Task%20Force/April%202014%20Taskforce%20Final%20Report.pdf

rational, substantial and verifiable plan to distribute money for education aid and school construction.” The judge found that Connecticut’s finance system—especially the Education Cost Sharing formula—failed to address gaps in school resources and community wealth found across the state. This ruling has rekindled a movement to revise Connecticut’s funding formula to better address equity and transparency. The ruling also points to the need to provide additional opportunities in lower-income communities—a conviction that could help to fuel the growth of ELOs.

The State of Connecticut has struggled with significant tax revenue shortfalls for the better part of a decade. In Connecticut, like most states, state revenue is the principal source of education funding. In FY2017, state legislators were forced to cut the overall state budget by \$1 billion and the state education budget by \$100 million, or 3.5 percent. Still more cuts were introduced mid-year. The Connecticut School Finance Project predicts that prospects for FY2018 are equally grim, with continued cuts to education budgets likely. The size and impact of state cuts has varied by school district. The state has, to some extent, protected funding for low-performing districts and for districts with a high percentage of low-income students. Still, the state’s after-school grant program (p. 29) is being considered for elimination.

This thinning of resources is also creating increased pressure on the state’s investments in programs like the Alliance Districts and Commissioner’s Network (p. 24). State officials reported parents as saying that targeted programs are taking funding away from other districts. Budget reductions have also been felt at state agencies. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) itself has faced significant layoffs; many offices are now minimally staffed and face work backlogs, blunting CSDE’s ability to provide strategic support and encouragement to districts to test out innovative reforms, including ELOs. The current fiscal climate of ever-shrinking budgets leaves few resources for the state to test and/or implement new reforms. One CSDE stakeholder shared that cuts are being felt across programs, including the Commissioner’s Network, the offices of Titles I, II, III and IX, and in programs related to preventing bullying and improving school climate.

Unlike some states with a very prescriptive approach to education, Connecticut’s legislature and state department place a high value on local control and decision making. Stakeholders described a preference for local flexibility and control when it comes to resource use and practice in public education. The state often provides a menu of options from which districts can choose rather than prescribing a single program model. This flexibility helps to explain the relatively long list of state programs with the potential to support expanded learning and the wide variety of models and approaches to ELOs that have been implemented across the state.

For more than a decade, Connecticut has promoted the growth of ELOs using a variety of policy levers by providing some dedicated funding for ELOs and by making ELOs an allowable expenditure for a number of funded programs. The Connecticut State Board of Education has long urged schools and districts to make better use of time for learning. As far back as 2003, the Board of Education issued a policy statement recommending that districts consider adopting a broad range of expanded learning opportunities, including before- and after-school programs, longer school days, and summer and vacation initiatives.¹⁴ More recently, Education Commissioner Dianna Wentzell has underscored continued CSDE support for ELOs, sharing, “we believe that extending time for learning can be a great lever for reform.” CSDE requires that districts offer summer school to students who fail to meet state benchmarks in reading, providing a policy foundation for expanded summer offerings in districts, but it offers no funding. State programs with dedicated or allowable funding for ELOs are described in the following section and in detail in the district profiles section that starts on page 20. They are also summarized in the table that follows:

¹⁴ <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/board/time.pdf>

Summary of Federal and State Programs

Federal and State Investments in ELOs	ELOs: Required or Allowable	Types of ELOs Included
Federal Grants		
Title I (including School Improvement Grants)	Allowable use of federal grant	Longer Day, Before/Afterschool, Summer, Community Schools
21st Century Community Learning Centers	Required use of federal grant; also requires a community partner	Before/Afterschool, Summer and Longer Day
State Grants		
Connecticut Afterschool Grant Program	Required use of state grant; also requires a community partner	Afterschool
Priority School District Grant	Allowable use of state grant	Before/Afterschool, Summer, Longer Day, Community Schools
Priority School District: Extended Hours Schools	Required use of state grant	Before/Afterschool, Summer
Priority School District: Summer Schools Program	Required use of state grant	Summer Emphasis on reading for K-3
Alliance District Grants	Allowable use of state grant	Before/Afterschool, Longer Day, Summer, Community Schools; <i>30 lowest-performing districts</i>
Commissioners Network	Allowable use of state grant	Before/Afterschool, Longer Day, Summer, Community Schools; <i>25 lowest-performing schools</i>

A Fortuitous Partnership between the Hartford Foundation and the Ford Foundation

The education context in Connecticut made the state a natural ally for the Ford Foundation when it was identifying potential states for its More and Better Learning Time initiative (MBLTI). Starting in 2011, then Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor, who was an advocate for expanded learning, began working with the Governor and the legislature to include numerous opportunities and

“encouragements” for schools and districts to implement a longer day/year in the 2012 reform package. Pryor was convinced that a longer day could be a key reform strategy for Connecticut’s most challenged schools. The Ford Foundation was looking for places to pilot its longer-day approach and a local partner to act as the statewide intermediary. And, thus, the longer-day stars aligned in Connecticut with the Hartford Foundation teaming up with Ford to establish the Connecticut TIME Collaborative.

In 2012, the Connecticut TIME Collaborative began operating as the steering committee for Connecticut’s

expanded learning time pilots. Steering Committee members included representatives from the State Department of Education, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Eastern Connecticut Community Foundation, the United Way of Meriden and Wallingford, and the National Center for Time and Learning. The Steering Committee's charge was to provide leadership in four arenas—practice, policy, partnerships, and public discourse—and to inform an emerging national conversation about expanded learning.

MBLTI pilot districts included the East Hartford, Meriden, New London, Bridgeport and Wyndham school districts.

The TIME Collaborative's extended learning pilots operated from 2012 to 2016. Pilot districts included the East Hartford, Meriden, New London, Bridgeport and Wyndham school districts. Ultimately, three cohorts comprised of six districts and 14 schools participated in the MBLTI in Connecticut. In 2015, the Ford Foundation decided to wind down the MBLTI and made a final round of grants to provide support and funding for local effort during the transition. Ford's exit came right on the heels of Stefan Pryor's resignation as Commissioner of Education. Within a matter of weeks, the initiative lost its national funder and most prominent state champion.

While a handful of the original 14 schools that participated in the TIME Collaborative still operate a longer school day, most do not, primarily due to substantial and increasing fiscal constraints. And while there are no firm numbers, current State Education Commissioner Wentzell and Desi Nesmith, the Chief of Turnaround at CSDE, indicate that few additional districts and schools have elected to lengthen their school days since the MBLTI pilot ended. Other stakeholders confirmed this finding, indicating that the ongoing costs and potential union challenges of implementing a longer day are often insurmountable. Many districts, instead, turned to other, less challenging options to expand learning time.

CONNECTICUT TIME COLLABORATIVE

The Connecticut TIME Collaborative launched in fall 2012 as a multi-year investment in the development of high-quality and sustainable expanded learning time (ELT). The TIME Collaborative was a partnership between the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), National Center for Time and Learning (NConnecticutL), Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Eastern Connecticut Community Foundation, United Way of Meriden and Wallingford, and COMPASS Youth Collaborative. Through the Collaborative, schools had access to technical experts who could support them in leveraging additional time to empower students with the knowledge, skills and experiences essential for college and career success.

When all was said and done, the TIME Collaborative's ELT work was viewed by many informants as a small "pilot." It is not clear whether this was due to lack of political will, lack of local support to sustain the work, lack of funding, the loss of key champions or the disruptive nature of the reform, but the confluence of all of these factors meant that, for the most part, sustainability for ELT was elusive.

In the wake of MBLTI, many different ELOs have continued to grow and flourish across the state, clearly influenced by the state policy context, available funding and stakeholder support. It is also clear that many of these ELOs had their roots in local philanthropic investments, such as those from the Hartford Foundation, which have helped to seed and support initiatives grounded in community partnerships. With local ownership for this work and a longer investment horizon, districts' ELOs are gaining traction and becoming an integral part of the fabric of their communities.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE HARTFORD FOUNDATION'S EDUCATION STRATEGY

The Hartford Foundation has a long history of supporting education in the greater Hartford area and it recognizes the critical role that public policy plays in supporting school improvement and student achievement. In 2012, with passage of the state's landmark education reform law (described on page 13), eight of the Hartford region's lowest performing school districts were designated Alliance Districts by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). As such, each was eligible to receive additional state funds and technical support to implement aggressive school improvement plans. The state's framework for the Alliance District program included both expanded learning opportunities and family and community partnership as critical components of school improvement, but it was widely recognized that the districts needed substantial capacity building in these areas.

At almost the same time that CSDE was developing its Alliance District program, Hartford Foundation leaders found themselves at an inflection point with the desire to intensify its efforts to increase educational equity in the region it serves. After years of funding individual after-school and other educational programs, the Foundation also had determined that improving vulnerable students' developmental and educational outcomes required true systemic change rather than largely programmatic investment. Starting in 2007, the Foundation began a shift toward systems change with the development of a community schools initiative in Hartford.

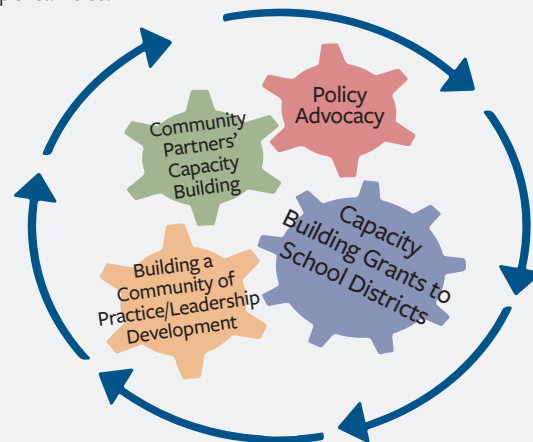
From the outset of the community schools initiative, the Foundation prioritized **partnership as a guiding principal in its own work**, acknowledging that no single actor can achieve broad goals and sustained impact alone. The Foundation asserted that "success" requires the collective action of public and private partners, families, and community organizations working together for the collective good. It adopted a focus on **equity and opportunity and high impact investments that yield clear and measurable benefit to student learning and student success**, distinguished from projects that are "light touch and low impact," according to Sara Sneed, the Foundation's Director of Education Investments. The results of the first five years of the Foundation's community schools investment have since been codified in a report available through the Foundation and [here](#).

Increasing Expanded Learning Opportunities through Systems Change

Building on lessons learned through its community schools investment, in 2014, the Foundation released a Request for Letters of Intent to the eight Alliance Districts located in the region it serves. This enabled each district to apply for a planning grant of up to \$50,000 to build upon broader plans approved by CSDE. In particular, it afforded the districts the opportunity to strengthen family, school, and community partnerships (FSCP) focused on supporting student learning and student success.

Each district that received a planning grant held multiple focus groups and planning meetings with district staff and the community. The Foundation also provided significant opportunities for district staff and partners to learn from key national thought leaders and researchers.¹⁵ In addition, the Foundation engaged a highly respected and retired local superintendent to coach and mentor district leaders and provide advice and counsel on their emerging FSCP strategies. In the end, each district identified approaches to family school and community partnership based on its own priorities with respect to student learning. In 2015, the Foundation provided the first of its project implementation grants to Manchester Public Schools, and it has since awarded grants to six of the districts that received planning grants.

The Foundation's family, school and community partnership investment encompasses more than capacity-building grants awarded to school districts. Its framework for systemic change includes four component investments conceptualized as "gearshifts" that synergistically support school districts and their partners' development of new student learning resources and opportunities.



THE HARTFORD FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC GIVING

INCREASING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY THROUGH FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The four gears, or components, include:

1) Capacity-Building Grants to School Districts.

As described above, the Hartford Foundation has provided capacity-building grants to six Alliance districts to implement family, school and community partnership plans that support student learning. In each instance, a portion of the funds has been used to develop a strengthened infrastructure to support family, school and community partnership (in most instances, a new cabinet-level staff position to lead the new central Offices of Family and Community Partnership supported with Foundation funds). A portion of the funding also is used to support districts' increased partnership practices, including staff training, policy development, program development and implementation, and evaluations measuring results.

2) Building a Community of Practice/Leadership Development.

To support implementation and the sustainability of each district's plans, the Hartford Foundation provides substantial technical assistance, training and coaching to district staff. Leadership teams from the districts are convened by the Foundation as a colloquium four times per year. During each colloquium, the districts and their partners are introduced to research and thought leaders from across the nation, and they engage in peer-to-peer learning, collectively strengthening their systemic change efforts. The new directors and coordinators of family and community partnerships (positions established with Foundation funds) also are convened monthly by the Foundation as a self-directed "District Leaders Think Tank" to wrestle with new district policies and related problems of practice.

3) Community Partners' Capacity-Building Supports.

The Hartford Foundation also provides support to the Children's Aid Society's National Center for Community Schools and the Connecticut Center for School Change, among others, to deliver training and technical assistance to local organizations that are partnering or considering partnering with school districts. Just as school districts often need to develop new capacities to partner effectively with families and community-based organizations, their partners also often need customized supports to bolster their contributions to student learning and student success.

4) Policy/Advocacy. An essential fourth aspect of the Foundation strategy is to support the development of local, state and federal policies and fiscal practices that can ensure family, school and community partnerships' focus on students' extending learning experiences.

The Foundation also has secured an independent evaluator, the Center for Assessment and Policy Development, to help measure the benefits of its investments.

While each Foundation grant focuses on a distinct, district-determined priority, there are several common features among them as a cohort:

- As part of the systems change focus, each district maintains a cabinet-level position focused on family/community engagement;
- Each district has established a new written policy to support FSCP district-wide;
- Each has shown the application and impact of its new FSCP policy in required district and school improvement plans;
- The Foundation has invested in all of the districts' FSCP-relevant professional development to help build their internal capacity to plan, implement and sustain effective partnership practices;
- All districts' family, school and community partnerships are required to be clearly and consistently aligned to students' learning goals;
- All districts participate in knowledge-sharing and field-building; and
- Each district has the opportunity to undertake a project demonstrating how it has changed its FSCP practices.

Hartford Foundation Alliance District Grant Focus Areas

Bloomfield – Expanded School Day

Windsor Locks – Mastery-based and Personalized Learning

Windsor – Authentic Family Engagement and Partnership

East Hartford – Authentic Family Engagement and Partnership

Vernon – Authentic Family and Community Partnership

Hartford – Development of Community Schools

Manchester – Authentic Family and Community Partnership

¹⁵ Thought leaders informing the Foundation's related initiatives have included Anthony Bryk of the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research; Karen Mapp of Harvard University; Jane Quinn of the Children's Aid Society; Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University; Chris Edley, dean of the University of California, Berkeley Law School; Robert Putnam, Pedro Noguera and Linda Darling-Hammond, among others.

A DEEPER LOOK AT MORE AND BETTER LEARNING TIME IN CONNECTICUT

When he took office in January of 2011, Connecticut's newly elected Democratic Governor Dannel Malloy was seeking to bring outside talent to the state. In seeking a "change agent," Malloy hired Stefan Pryor, who had most recently served as an aide to Newark's then-mayor Cory Booker.¹⁶ Pryor was looking to bring a spirit of innovation to Connecticut. And, as a charter school veteran, he was excited about the idea of more time for learning: "The notion was that time [in school] ought not to be held constant with achievement as the variable; the reverse ought to be true."¹⁷

Not long after he took office in 2011, Pryor began conversations with the Ford Foundation and Jennifer Davis, then Executive Director of the National Center for Time and Learning (NCTL), which had just received funding from Ford to provide technical support to MBLTI. NCTL had been advocating for extended learning time across the country and at the federal level for years and it had great success in helping to establish a state funding program for schools implementing extended learning time in nearby Massachusetts. Around the same time, the state received approval from the U.S. Department of Education for a waiver from many of the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (ESSA's predecessor). One of the flexibilities Connecticut was granted under this waiver was the option to use some of its 21CCLC funding to extend the school day. This small amount of program funding and the commitment of technical support from NCTL served as the basis for establishing the Connecticut TIME Collaborative.

MBLTI pilot districts received extensive support from the NCTL based in nearby Boston. The NCTL team also included a former CT superintendent who served as NCTL's local lead, provided multiple full-day sessions plus on-site support and coaching for district and school teams engaged in planning for their district or school's extended learning initiative. NCTL also provided implementation guides, sample schedules, organized school tours and on-line learning opportunities. While Ford provided some limited financial support to schools and districts for the planning phase (\$20,000-\$50,000), districts were expected to identify and access other funding sources, including the 21CCLC extended learning funds and state resources directed to the state's highest-need districts, to cover the costs of implementation.

With the twin losses of Pryor—a key champion—in 2014 and support from the Ford Foundation in 2016, the Connecticut TIME Collaborative wrapped up its MBLTI work. The state, however, continued its support for ELOs through previously established programs and investments. And starting in 2014, the Hartford Foundation deepened its commitment to equity, focusing its newest initiative on supporting the state's most challenged districts.

The MBLTI pilots showed that:

>> Expanding the school day can contribute to a variety of positive outcomes. A recent report that looked across all the MBLTI states and districts indicated improved outcomes in the areas of community partnerships and engagement, student engagement, and teacher collaboration.¹⁸

>> Expanding the school day for all students is an expensive reform that ultimately requires ongoing dedicated funding. Even districts that think creatively and find ways to contain the costs of a longer day or year (e.g., by employing a staggered staffing schedule or creative transportation solutions) can't avoid the significant added costs (largely related to staff) of a longer day. State officials reported that one school, despite a very successful longer day program, is struggling to find funds to continue the reform as its grant funding declines. There was no indication that the district will be able to replace the lost resources.

>> Expanding the school day for all students is complicated, because it impacts many stakeholders and systems, including:

- Families and their long-held expectations about children's opportunities, responsibilities, and logistics before and after school.
- Teachers, their schedules and union contracts, not to mention their own family logistics.
- Community and school-based before- and after-school program providers and sports teams by limiting hours of program operation and making it challenging to find practice and meeting times.
- Transportation systems that may need to be expanded and/or reconfigured to accommodate new schedules.

>> The MBLTI pilots may have been more sustainable had they established deeper partnerships with community organizations. Some extended learning critics who participated in the TIME Collaborative argue that the role of community partners was not emphasized enough as part of the MBLTI, that the reform is too costly when it relies solely on certified teachers, and that this a key reason that ELT did not grow deeper roots in Connecticut.

¹⁶ Pazniokas, M. (August 18, 2014) Stefan Pryor to Leave Education Post After One Term. *Connecticut Mirror*.

¹⁷ Pryor, S. (December 2012) How the Time Collaborative of Helping States Close Achievement and Opportunity Gaps. [speech]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA5ie2-MN1o>

¹⁸ Center on Education Policy. (January 2017) Legacy of More and Better Learning Time: Grantee and Stakeholder Reflections. District of Columbia: George Washington University.

IV. A Rich Mosaic of ELOs in Connecticut

Stakeholders shared that many schools and districts across the state have been and are investing in a variety of different extended learning models, from academic enrichment summer programs to full-service community schools to extended school year and expanded learning time for their most at-risk students. Profiled below are the efforts of three districts and a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) that have taken advantage of the state's financial support and programmatic and policy flexibility to implement ELOs. The profiles also highlight the important role that philanthropy and community partners have played in this arena. All three districts have benefited from the support of the Hartford Foundation and/or the Connecticut TIME Collaborative.

These profiles include:

- **Meriden Public Schools**

Adopted a longer school day to provide students more time for learning and teachers more time to collaborate.

- **Bloomfield Public Schools**

Initially, added enhanced summer programs for all students in grades K-12, and is currently adopting a longer school day.

- **Hartford Public Schools**

Embraced a community school strategy to provide a broad array of services and supports, including ELOs, for students and families.

Also included is an overview of the **Coalition for New Britain's Youth** that has formed a network of CBOs to focus on expanding access to high-quality after-school and summer programs.

A DEEPER LOOK

Meriden Public Schools

Adopted a longer school day to provide students more time for learning and teachers more time to collaborate.

It's one of the most common, and confounding, questions in K-12 education today: How do you turn a low-performing school into a high-performing school? In Meriden, the premise was simple. "We always knew our students needed more time with their teachers and that teachers needed more time to collaborate," said Superintendent Mark Benigni. But time is money, and the district hasn't received a funding increase from its local municipality in eight years. More time also takes a partnership with the teachers union, and that's where the conversation about a longer day often begins and ends in many districts.

But Meriden is different. In 2011, led by their teachers union, a team of eight educators from Meriden attended a conference of the National Center on Time and Learning in Boston to learn more about schools that had extended and reengineered the school day. The group separated and went to multiple school sites, most of which were charter or magnet schools, the typical place for this kind of reform. They liked what they saw—schools were putting the fun back in learning. "We had become so much about math and reading. Drill after drill. We thought, imagine what we could bring back into the school with that extra time," Benigni said. "What would prevent us from doing this in regular schools? Fear of change and failure?"

Prepared to manage the change, the Meriden Federation of Teachers, in partnership with district leadership, applied for an AFT Innovation Fund grant to extend the school day in three schools. The district was awarded the three-year, \$500,000 grant, and, at the same time, was invited to join the state's TIME Collaborative, where they would receive "very helpful" on-site technical assistance, materials for parents and the community, and support for staff development. A two-year NCLB waiver enabled Meriden to access 21CCLC funds for the longer day to complete the initial funding picture, but again, time was an issue. The district received the grant in June and had to open its first extended-day

school in August. They decided on Pulaski, a low-performing school where a dynamic, successful veteran principal was taking the reins, and they set to work gaining community buy-in.

"When you mess with schedules, families can get really defensive," said Pulaski Principal Dan Coffey. Time for sleep, breakfast and after-school activities was in play. "It definitely took some salesmanship," said Coffey. After a successful community forum, Pulaski landed on a 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. schedule. Adding the time in the morning meant parents didn't have to pay for care before school, and students were still out in time for sports practice and other activities. Still, some parents weren't convinced. Coffey asked them to try it for a couple of weeks to see how it felt.

"We had become so much about math and reading. Drill after drill. We thought, imagine what we could bring back into the school with that extra time," Benigni said. "What would prevent us from doing this in regular schools? Fear of change and failure?"

The new schedule needed to feel great, and different. After all, the success of the reform hinged on student attendance, and attendance was a struggle at Pulaski. Kids needed to come every day. Coffey knew that with 80 percent of Pulaski's students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals, certain experiences were often out of their reach. He wanted to put those experiences right into the school day. So, Coffey offered teachers the opportunity to teach enrichment courses based on their passions and reached out to identify local community organizations that could

complement the courses. Tapping into the talent of community educators while freeing up teacher time and keeping the budget down was a win-win-win for the school. With at least six extended-day school staff working side-by-side with community-based partners at each school, things like karate, pottery, music lessons and access to new technology became part of the day, every day, at Pulaski. And, it worked. Kids didn't want to miss woodworking and karate, which meant they also wouldn't miss reading, math or science.

The new schedule worked for teachers, too. They had choices. They could choose to work a longer day for additional pay, or they could opt to work regular hours, coming in at one of two staggered start times. This ensured that the school had coverage from certified staff but didn't force anyone to work a schedule they didn't choose. Teachers appreciated the chance to share a personal passion with students, and students and teachers loved getting to know each other in a different way. Having teachers opt into working the longer school day also meant enrichment could tie back in with the core curriculum and provide important background knowledge for students. Teachers were also able to support partners by sharing their own skills in classroom management.

The effect was noticeable, and parents quickly got on board. Over the three years of the grant, Meriden expanded the effort to two additional schools, and all three are operating extended day schedules to this day. The district gets very few requests to move students out of the extended-day schools (or out of the district) and far more requests to move them in. With the extended day, students at Pulaski attend school the equivalent of 41 extra days each year; by fifth grade, students have received an extra year of school. Attendance at Pulaski is up 10 percentage points. It is still the school with the second-highest poverty rate in the district, *but now it's also the second-highest performing, outperforming even surrounding suburban schools on state accountability measures.*

A few policies needed to change to make the extended day possible. Primarily, the changes needed to happen with the teachers union and union contracts. The union had to agree that CBO staff could work side-by-side with teachers during

PRIORITY SCHOOL DISTRICT — SUMMER SCHOOL AND EXTENDED SCHOOL HOURS GRANTS

In 1989, Connecticut established the Priority School District (PSD) program to drive additional resources to support academic achievement and enhance learning opportunities. According to statute, designated districts include those serving the 8 largest towns in the state, plus 11 districts that have the highest poverty and/or poorest rates of student achievement.¹⁹ The program remains in place, and, in SY 2016-17, \$36 million in grants were provided to 15 districts across the state, including Meriden.²⁰ Grants range in size from \$700,000 to \$6 million with an average award of \$2.4 million. Priority School District funding can be used in eight different reform areas, including academic enrichment, tutorial and recreation programs outside school hours and in the summer; developing or expanding early reading intervention supports, which can include summer and after-school programming; and strengthening parent and community involvement in school and district activities.

In addition to the primary PSD grant, the statute provides two additional funding streams: the PSD Extended School Hours and Summer School programs. The Extended School Hours (ESH) program can be used to support academic, enrichment and/or recreation programs in PSDs that are held before and after school and during school vacations, including during the summer. In FY2016-17, a total of \$3 million in ESH grants were awarded. The Summer School program provides funding for extra support for PSD students in grades K-3 who are behind in reading. \$3.5 million in summer school grants were awarded in FY2016-17.²¹

¹⁹ Priority School District Criteria and Funding. OLR Research Report. (July 13, 2005). Retrieved from <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2005/rpt/2005-R-0561.htm>

²⁰ http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/turnaround_office/priority_school_district_grant_allocations_2016_2017.pdf

²¹ Ibid.

the school day. They had to be okay with staggered teacher schedules and with designing and testing out the extended day positions. After two years of implementation, they codified the changes into the teacher contract.

Benigni offers advice for funders who are considering supporting extended day efforts. Initially, he says, the funding needs to support implementation and staff time in the classroom, not just planning and training. Give the effort at least three years, and ideally five, to take root and demonstrate success that will lead to support from the local school board. And finally, he adds, be flexible. Principals often know what is best for their schools and need the chance to make changes and refine new strategies.

Funding for extended-day efforts is an ongoing challenge. Not only is the AFT grant complete, but with the transition to ESSA, it is also not clear whether the state will continue to allow 21CCLC to be used for extended day, and Alliance funding (see p. 24), which the district has used since the AFT grant ended, is uncertain. Benigni says the only way to

sustain the work they are doing in the long term is for the school board to buy into the results and take on some of the costs in their budget, as they have done. Expansion to new schools won't be easy, but Benigni is hopeful.

“If we still had the private funding and 21st Century, I'd tell you that within five years, all eight elementary schools would be extended day,” Benigni said. “You're seeing other districts in Connecticut give up on these programs. I can't give up on results this good. Nothing has worked as well.”

A DEEPER LOOK

Bloomfield Public Schools

Initially added enhanced summer programs for all students in grades K-12, and is currently adopting an extended school day.

You might think a summer program called Early Start would have parents and students alike groaning at their alarm clocks, but in Bloomfield, the bells don't start early—the relationships do.

Early Start (for K-8 students) and its companion, Summer Academy (for 9-12 students) is a signature piece of Bloomfield Superintendent James Thompson's effort to turn his district from one of the lowest performing in the state to one of the highest performing. Beginning in January of each year, teachers use school data to identify students who will benefit the most from an extra four-week jumpstart on the next school year, including time with their new teachers.

“When we look at preparing our students for college and career, more time is critical,” Thompson said. “But one size doesn't fit all. Some kids need intervention, and some kids need acceleration, and we're prepared to meet them where they are.” Thompson acknowledges that the district's ELO strategy did not always include acceleration but rather evolved over time to meet a need.

He's pleased with the results.

According to Thompson, more than 60 percent of the district's K-8 students and 40 percent of high school students participate in Early Start/Summer Academy. The program's 98 percent average daily attendance rate is much higher than an average summer school program, according to the RAND Corporation's evaluation of similar programs in five urban school districts.²² Dr. Thompson attributes the high participation rate to an overall cultural shift in Bloomfield that is owned by teachers, parents, students, administrators, board members and town council members alike.

During spring meetings, teachers talk with parents about their child's progress and opportunities for the summer, which include online opportunities for credit recovery. Students also have the chance to take AP courses and start Algebra I early, both key indicators for high school success.

“If they are already on the fast track, we keep them there,” said Thompson. Such meetings reinforce the district's efforts to educate and equip parents to be decision makers in their child's education.

Teachers are also important to the program and the district's success more broadly. Dr. Thompson cites John Hattie's effect size research as an influence on his approach to turning around the district, which suggests, in part, that a teacher's own expectations of students can have the greatest impact on their achievement. For their summer classes, teachers set expectations by helping to customize the curriculum, narrowing down what they can meaningfully cover in four weeks. Whereas many districts see summer as a time to test new strategies or partnerships, the goal is for Bloomfield's summer programs to feel seamless with the school year. Stacey McCann, Assistant Superintendent of School Improvement and Intervention, says teachers are eager to teach in the program. “We don't have to convince them. They see it as an opportunity to increase student achievement.”

BLOOMFIELD'S EXTENDED DAY INITIATIVE

In addition to its summer programs, Bloomfield is also pursuing an extended day strategy in the elementary grades with support from the Hartford Foundation. The district is partnering with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hartford to provide project-based STEAM lessons (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) during the extra time. District leaders hope to offer an extended day for students all the way through middle school in the coming years.

²² Augustine, C. H., et al. Learning from Summer: Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Urban Youth. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1557.html.

“More time for learning is one of the key strategies to close achievement gaps. Policy should reflect that.”

Early Start is one of several key reforms in the district since Thompson took the helm in 2011, including an extended school day for grades 2 to 4, a middle school after-school program, and a mentoring program for ninth grade students. In that time, the combination of reforms has driven remarkable growth in proficiency on standardized tests and four-year graduation rates, reaching a rate of 91 percent on the latter in the 2015-16 school year. And the word is spreading; after a decade of declining enrollment, Bloomfield is on track for a four percent increase this year.

The only looming cloud on this success is a loss of funding that supports low-performing districts. Bloomfield will likely no longer be considered an Alliance district (see text box) by the state as of July 2017. Alliance funding has been important to the extended-school-year program—with the district using anywhere from 19 to 53 percent of its Alliance funding (about \$850,000 per year) for summer teachers, support staff and instructional supplies between 2014 and 2017. Losing that undesired distinction means losing grant funding that helped to support Early Start and extended-day efforts.

Thompson knows sustainability will be a challenge, but he’s confident that the district’s strong track record and his relationship with the school board will continue the momentum. This year, the district plans to reach out to families who have enrolled in magnet schools in the surrounding area to encourage them to take another look at Bloomfield.

Thompson is reflective on the role state and private funding can play in ELOs. “I think as important as expanded learning time is, it should have stand-alone funding from the state. More time for learning is one of the key strategies to close achievement gaps. Policy should reflect that.” He says districts and funders both want to increase student achievement, but sometimes they don’t take the time to understand each other’s perspectives on how to get there. “We all need to be on the same page. It’s important to stay the course.”

ALLIANCE DISTRICT GRANT PROGRAM/ COMMISSIONER’S NETWORK

Started in 2012 as part of the state’s major education reform, the Alliance District Program and the Commissioner’s Network were designed to provide extra resources to support turnaround in the state’s 30 lowest-performing districts (the Alliance Program) and up to 25 of the state’s lowest-performing schools (the Commissioner’s Network). Both programs require an application and, as implemented from 2012 through 2017, can support a broad education reform agenda. The state’s turnaround framework specifies a wide variety of types of reforms, including expanded learning opportunities and family, school and community partnerships. The Commissioner’s Network offers additional flexibilities to local stakeholders, teachers and school leaders to implement innovative practices to dramatically change the trajectory of their schools. In 2016-27, the Alliance Grants provided approximately \$140 million in additional resources to the 30 eligible districts.²³ In the same year, there were a total of 17 schools participating in the Commissioner’s network and a total budget of \$10.6 million.²⁴

Bloomfield used part of its Alliance funding to cover staffing for the Early Start and Summer Academy summer programs in the district. Because Bloomfield’s student achievement levels have increased, beginning in 2017, it likely will no longer qualify for Alliance funding. Bloomfield is optimistic the state will transition three such “Promise Districts” with a separate pool of funding beginning in 2017-2018.

²³ <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2683&Q=334226>; Funding information from <http://ctschoofinance.org/assets/uploads/files/Alliance-District-Funding-FY-2016-17-Changes.pdf>

²⁴ http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commissionersnetwork/commissioners_network_guidelines.pdf

A DEEPER LOOK

Hartford Public Schools

Embraced a community school strategy to provide a broad array of services and supports, including ELOs, for students and families.

It took an Interim Superintendent eager to build relationships with the community in 2007 to spark the community school movement in Hartford, leveraging and building on several years of investment by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving in an After-School Initiative. With the Hartford Foundation and others poised for deeper systems reform and with key resources in place, the Hartford School-Community Partnership (SCP) was formed to include the City of Hartford, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Hartford Public Schools and the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut. This SCP then led the development of Hartford Community Schools.

The SCP developed a request for proposals to identify “lead agencies” capable of coordinating the delivery of multiple student and family support services in five initial schools. Lead agency selection committees engaged parents, principals, neighborhood organizations and school governance representatives from each of the five schools. Based on their abilities and needs assessments conducted by the schools, the committees selected three lead agencies to begin planning in 2008. The SCP then grew to support four lead agencies across seven schools in 2011. In 2012, the SCP assumed a broader agenda, re-named itself the Hartford Partnership for Student Success (HPSS) and created a new MOU to support its broadened work supporting the development of quality student support resources across the district and beyond community schools.

Today, the community schools effort in Hartford is almost 10 years old, and while HPSS has experienced success, its story is not without ups and downs. The Hartford Community Schools conversation began with the Hartford Foundation setting out to study best practices in family engagement, a famously challenging but critical component of K-12 education. Seeking expert counsel and technical assistance, the Children’s Aid Society was engaged, which, in turn, introduced the idea of community schools. This prompted the Hartford Foundation to survey community

schools across the county and convene like-minded funders to learn from their experiences.

Research highlighted important features of community schools that further shaped the Hartford Foundation and its partners’ thinking. Community-school efforts ideally are not funder-driven but rooted instead in community-wide, cross-sector partnerships. The Hartford Foundation was particularly inspired by the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) model in Portland and its cross-sector governance structure, which brought together the city and school district with the business and philanthropic sectors and local families. SUN Community Schools feature six main elements. In addition to rigorous instruction and social and health services, these elements include expanded learning supports for young people, homework help, tutoring, teambuilding, sports, industrial skills and games as well as supports for adults in leadership, language learning and education. The Hartford Foundation was convinced that this could be a great model for Hartford, and the School-Community-Partnership agreed.

“Community schools bring to a school district an appreciation that schools are not just in communities, they are of communities and the whole community can play a role in supporting student learning and student success.”

During the ramp up of community schools, leadership transitions at Hartford Public Schools continued to challenge the district. Hartford counts seven superintendents in 10 years. Additionally, many schools are under-enrolled, and one community school had to be closed

because of chemical contamination, displacing students and families. The city presently is dealing with a tough state and local budget outlook, and the mayor is wrestling with whether or not to declare bankruptcy.

“It’s not that community schools prevent storms,” says Sara Sneed, the Hartford Foundation’s Director of Education Investments. “Their many resources and supports simply enable children and communities to weather them better.” Sneed says community schools’ holistic approach to children’s health and development as well as their academic achievement, and the schools’ inclusion of a wide set of supports and services such as dental and mental health care, trauma-informed services, and cultural enrichment and celebration, serves more than students. “Community schools bring to a school district an appreciation that schools are not just in communities, they are of communities and the whole community can play a role in supporting student learning and student success.”

ELOs are one of the core elements across each of Hartford’s seven community schools. Each school’s ELOs are designed to support both students’ academic performance and broader positive youth development. Each school provides both after-school and summer programs that are run by the school’s lead agency or another local youth-serving non-profit. These programs typically are staffed by teachers and youth workers, and there is a strong effort to ensure that the efforts of a school’s lead agency and instructional leadership are consistently well aligned and integrated. This integration, supported by an “education coordinator” position at each school, helps to help ensure that all of its “wraparound” academic programs and enrichment activities are well-aligned to the school curriculum.

These efforts have paid significant dividends. [A recent evaluation](#) of the community-schools initiative shows that scores for students in the after-school programs increased for both reading and math over the same one-year period. The evaluation also shows that there are even more significant long-term benefits from participation: the increase in test scores was even greater for students who had participated in the program for three or more years.

“Families don’t see community schools’ many support services as an extra; but as essential components of their schools,” says HPSS Director Tauheedah Jackson. “Whenever a potential loss of services or funding comes into play, families speak out for community schools.”

And there is evidence that the community is willing to fight for its community schools. Hartford recently started and then postponed a school consolidation process that raised uncertainty about whether certain community schools or programs would be eliminated. “Families don’t see community schools’ many support services as an extra; but as essential components of their schools,” says HPSS Director Tauheedah Jackson. “Whenever a potential loss of services or funding comes into play, families speak out for community schools.”

Funding and sustainability also are always front of mind for HPSS. Hartford Community Schools’ multi-tiered governance structure is a point of pride and support for the schools’ sustainability, and it’s also a non-negotiable. HPSS presently is supported by a leadership team of the mayor, superintendent and CEOs of partnering entities who meet to undertake pivotal policy decisions; a Partnership table, consisting of directors and managers from HPSS entities who “frequently sit together to plan, make decisions, problem-solve, and ensure the quality of community school operations,” says Sneed; an Operations Team that includes HPSS staff and lead agency directors; a system-wide Hartford Community Schools Network that includes the leadership of all the school sites; and site-based teams that guide the schools’ day to day work. In 2016, Aetna and Hartford Insurance Group joined HPSS, adding important representation from the business sector.

Support for the full system is critical to HPSS membership. Partners are expected to go beyond funding individual

community schools to fund the infrastructure for the partnership (which currently consists of two full-time staff) as well as evaluation and technical assistance. Over time, the HPSS also has shifted from being a closed group to looking at how it could strategically engage partners beyond funders. As a result, it is currently exploring a deeper relationship with the business and higher education communities, among others.

Ten years will mark an important milestone. Hartford Community Schools and the HPSS have achieved a number of successes, and the initiative continues to evolve. Sneed says that among other developments, the next iterations

of the work will focus more explicitly on racial equity. “The school closure issue in Hartford is rife with racial implications, but I am hopeful,” she said. “In Hartford, as across the nation, if we can find our way to engender an increased public will to support public education, it likely will be because we have wrestled with and developed strategies to dismantle the historic underpinnings of inequity.” The research and Hartford’s experience indicates that community schools are a just such an effective strategy, offering multiple benefits to children and other education stakeholders.

A DEEPER LOOK

Coalition for New Britain's Youth

Formed a network of community-based organizations to focus on expanding access to high-quality after-school and summer programs.

The past decade has seen cradle-to-career collective impact efforts expand rapidly as communities seek solutions to systemic issues like health and education. Still, it's not difficult to remember a time when such alignment and collaboration were foreign concepts. Prior to 2005, after-school was a bit of a competitive industry in New Britain. No one held the vision, or the data, to be strategic about programming and how resources were spent, so providers were competing for limited school sites and funding. With its decision to make expanded learning opportunities a signature strategy, the American Savings Foundation (ASF), a local private foundation, knew the way to bring the effort to scale and make an impact would be through a coordinated effort across New Britain. As with all community-wide collaborations, it would take years of learning and consensus building to get there. But they had to start somewhere.

"We support various youth providers across the City of New Britain," said Maria Sanchez. "We wanted to bring them all together to address youth needs."

In 2005, ASF exercised its unique convening power as a funder to bring together a disconnected field of after-school providers for the launch of its ELO initiative. Over breakfast, ASF leaders began by asking the group of providers how the foundation could support their work. Much to their surprise, there was agreement. "They said, 'We don't have a forum to speak and work together,'" Sanchez said. "The president and I looked at each other and said, 'We can do that!'"

The community-based organizations (CBOs) were back the next month for their first meeting. ASF hired a consultant for the first year to help the providers develop a strategy and work plan for their collaborative efforts. The CBOs agreed that a common language for quality practice was a top need and selected the Assessment of Program Practices (APT) quality tool from the National Institute on Out-of-School Time as their guide. Having a common tool led to the opportunity for joint training among CBOs, and ultimately, joint advocacy at the state level. The group got a win with a

new state after-school grant program (see text box on page 29), and the tide started to turn. "Once we started to feel some success, people started letting their guard down and stopped operating in siloes," said Tracey Madden-Hennessey, associate director of the YWCA of New Britain.

Not all of the participating CBOs met the capacity requirements to receive program funding from ASF. Still, the opportunity to connect with colleagues and benefit from the network's training kept them coming back. The group named themselves the New Britain Youth Network (the Network).

"Once we started to feel some success, people started letting their guard down and stopped operating in siloes," said Tracey Madden-Hennessey, associate director of the YWCA of New Britain.

From the beginning of its ELO initiative, ASF relied on the work of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation's influential 2003 publication, "Critical Hours." In 2008, Nellie Mae began funding the Summer Learning Demonstration Project in four communities in Rhode Island and later featured the school-community partnership model in Woonsocket in a subsequent publication. Network members saw an opportunity to do something similar in New Britain. With state policy providing the impetus—CSDE already required that districts offer summer school to students in the bottom 20th percentile of test scores in reading and math—they saw room to improve the typical remedial model. "We thought, 'We have to do this anyway. Why don't we see what we can come up with?'" said Sanchez.

In 2011, New Britain's Summer Enrichment Experience (SEE) was launched as the first collaborative effort of the Network. Starting in Smalley Academy, an elementary school serving 100 students in fourth and fifth grades,

SEE targeted students who were struggling in reading. The program brought together district teachers with CBO staff to create a full day of standards-aligned curricula through a co-teaching model in the morning and CBO-led enrichment in the afternoon including martial arts, dance and theatre. The results at Smalley in the first two years were notable – increases in reading scores and fewer discipline problems when students returned to school in the fall.

By 2013, the district and Network opted to shift the program to rising first through third graders in response to an increased focus on third-grade reading proficiency and chronic absence. With the full support of the Network, SEE now reaches 600 children at three different sites. The Network has made scaling possible, starting with four community-based partners and growing to 19 participating partners today.

SEE's success opened the district's eyes to the power of school-community partnerships. The district created a new community outreach position and started to look across its expanded learning partnerships to develop an intentional strategy. The focus at the central office spurred additional collaboration on the ground. Both district middle schools now have an after-school task force, bringing together all of the after-school providers with the principal, social workers, guidance counselors, funders and central office staff to talk about strategy and which students to invite to each program. The district also shares student data with CBOs. "Now, someone from the YWCA can call the data person at the district and give student ID numbers, and he will run reports for her," said Madden-Hennessey. "That didn't happen before SEE. Results matter."

In 2014, the New Britain Youth Network merged with the School Readiness Council and the Coalition for New Britain's Children to form the Coalition for New Britain's Youth (the Coalition), a group focused on improving outcomes from birth to age 24. ASF funds the Coalition to provide ongoing training to its members. They are also working hard to sustain the momentum. "We're the poster child for partnerships with funders," said Robin Lamott Sparks, executive director of the Coalition. Sparks attributes some of New Britain's success to a diverse array of funders willing to support the backbone work that the Coalition leads. But she knows that people can be here today and gone tomorrow. "The real key to sustainability is the degree to which you can create systems and a culture that lasts," she said. The Coalition is located in the Chamber of Commerce, providing a connection between

the city's economic development and social services. Sparks says winning national awards is great for sustainability, too, and New Britain has won two All-America Cities Awards and an Excellence in Summer Learning Award in recent years. "When you get the mayor feeling positive and recognizing your work, it really helps."

Sanchez suggests that funders should practice patience with their ELO efforts. "Funders want results right away. If the first year doesn't go so well, they think the whole thing isn't worth doing. You have to be flexible. You have to allow organic processes to happen. When you're aiming for social change, it's about the community, and that's messy work. "

ASF has set high expectations of its grantees from the beginning to continuously improve and strive for best practice. "We were surprised by who rose and who didn't," says Sanchez. "The ones that are invested in the kids are really invested. This community is richer for it."

CONNECTICUT STATE AFTERSCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM

In school year 2006-07, the state piloted the Connecticut Afterschool Grant Program, which was made permanent the following year. The program, structured similarly to the federal 21CCLC program, awards funding to school districts, community-based organizations or towns to implement or expand high-quality programs that provide academic, enrichment and/or recreational activities for students in grades K-12. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) gives competitive priority to applications proposing to serve students in low-performing schools and to applications submitted jointly by districts and public or private community organizations. The program has continued to grow over time, serving approximately 4,400 students across 19 school districts with an average grant size of \$162,000 in 2013, according to a report by the University of Connecticut.²⁵ Parent engagement is a requirement of the program; grantees must commit a minimum of five percent of their grant budget to support activities designed to build the program's and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement to support student achievement.

²⁵ Reid, A. et al. Connecticut's State-Funded After School Programs, 2013-14. Connecticut State Department of Education. Center for Applied Research in Human Development, University of Connecticut.

V. Key Themes

Expanded Learning Opportunities for Connecticut students come in many shapes and sizes and include extended day, extended year, summer, after-school and community school initiatives. Even though the state's ELO portfolio is diverse, some consistent themes show that similar factors are influencing ELO implementation across the state.

>> In Connecticut, federal and state policies, priorities and resources are shaping the development and expansion of ELOs.

- The state offers a variety of turnaround supports and several flexible funding resources that are helping to spur an increase in ELOs across the state.
- State summer school requirements for low-performing students create a foundation for school and community partners to offer expanded enrichment activities that may not otherwise be available to students.
- ELOs also play a role in supporting district and state priorities, for example by helping to improve student attendance rates, providing students with additional support in key areas such as literacy, and serving as “incubators” for district priorities and programs.
- Funding is the biggest obstacle to the growth and sustainability of ELOs. Many stakeholders indicated that if there were more resources, they would expand ELOs; several districts that considered and/or experimented with a longer day returned to a traditional schedule when federal and/or philanthropic funding for these programs diminished.
- Leaders also shared that it is very difficult to implement a change strategy, like expanded learning, with short-term funding, and they were concerned about how they would continue to fund ELOs if state funding, particularly funding for the Alliance program, is reduced.

- On the other hand, several district leaders explained that robust ELOs allow them to better compete with magnet schools and draw more students into their districts, in turn bringing more resources from the state. District leaders also indicated that over time, as they continue to see positive results from ELOs, they will be better positioned to make the case to their local boards for additional funding.

>> ELOs continue to evolve to meet the needs of schools and families and the availability of resources in districts.

- There is no playbook when it comes to ELOs, and districts are making their own way forward, adjusting and/or modifying their approaches to gain more traction, better align with district and community needs and target resources where they are needed most. In some districts, this has meant starting with pilot programs that served a few grades or a limited number of schools.
- ELO implementation often requires “cultural shifts” on the part of schools and families. For districts and schools looking to expand the regular school day, many stakeholders indicated that, at least in the beginning, new schedules were met with some resistance by parents and school staff alike. And the bigger the change, the more resistance. Districts have worked through this resistance by forging strong relationships with teachers, allowing staff to opt into ELO models, and designing approaches that create the least possible disruption to family routines.

>> In Connecticut, local and national philanthropy have played a key role in the growth of ELOs.

- In Hartford, the Hartford Foundation has been instrumental in supporting the growth and development of community schools for almost a decade. In addition, for the last four years, they have directly and indirectly supported seven high-need Hartford-area districts to develop new expanded learning opportunities through the establishment of family, school and community partnerships.
- Through the Connecticut TIME Collaborative, the Hartford Foundation and the Ford Foundation helped to shape the growth of ELOs across the state.
- Other national foundations have made significant contributions to ELO expansion, both through grant making and by developing a knowledge base from which districts can draw.
- Local foundations and funding collaboratives have also played a significant role in supporting ELOs through direct funding and by helping to coordinate programming in specific communities.

>> Districts are choosing to involve community partners to create a broader and richer experience for students.

- Several districts designed their ELOs with a “divide and conquer” approach based on the belief that certified teachers are singularly qualified for academic instruction and community partners are a better and lower-cost option for enrichment activities. Over time, some district leaders came to understand that district staff and partner agencies have complementary strengths and can learn from and support each other.
- Some districts value CBO’s youth development expertise and focus on social and emotional learning. They are also turning to community partners to provide a larger range of enrichment opportunities.

- Regardless of impetus for the partnerships, it was clear that partnering with community organizations requires new skills and capacities—on both sides. At a minimum, districts needed a point person to help coordinate the work of partners and to ensure quality.

>> Many stakeholders in Connecticut are working to create a more equitable system of education.

- ELOs have become an important strategy when it comes to addressing equity. Many ELOs, particularly those supported by public funds, target supports to students most in need to help address growing gaps in achievement between more affluent students and those from lower-income families. All of the profiled ELOs—Community Schools in Hartford, extended school year in Bloomfield, a longer day in Meriden, and coordinated after-school and summer programming in New Britain—are providing students with a range of opportunities that are more readily available in affluent communities helping to close opportunity gaps.

>> Stakeholder support and commitment from state and district leadership are critical to the long-term success of any ELO.

- The profiles highlighted the important role that district superintendents and business leaders play in garnering support for and implementing ELOs. In several districts, the power of the work came from a clear link to learning.
- In the design of ELOs, district leaders have worked closely with families to ensure support and participation. This has included soliciting and factoring in family input on key design decisions, ensuring transportation for participating students, and regularly meeting with families to understand their needs and develop solutions.

VI. Recommendations

Connecticut's story includes many lessons that can be instructive for foundations and other entities that are considering supporting ELOs.

1) Make a long-term commitment. Systems change requires long-term support—districts and partners need sufficient time and resources to refine their efforts and determine how they will be sustained over the long term. Long-term support also ensures that initiatives can survive all-too-common transitions in school and city leadership that can destabilize ELO implementation efforts. Carefully map the lifecycle of other major initiatives and leadership posts as you plan your ELO effort. In their planning conversations, funders and prospective grantees should discuss the ideal time horizon based on their previous efforts and experiences.

The Hartford Foundation has invested over \$1.5 million per year in summer programs for over a decade. The Wallace Foundation and David and Lucile Packard Foundation made six- and seven-year commitments, respectively, to their summer learning initiatives, each offering significant sustainability planning support for grantees and supplemental grants to build capacity in key areas in addition to program implementation grants. Read [“Seven Years of Summer”](#) for the story of Packard's catalytic investment in California.

2) Set a table for stakeholders. There are a number of important reasons for foundations and other intermediary organizations to serve as a convener when launching ELO initiatives. First, neutral organizations and intermediary organizations can bring together community providers and state and district leaders to spur alignment and centralize essential functions around quality, evaluation, and professional development, creating capacity that most providers couldn't afford on their own. Second, ELOs need to be connected to state and district strategy to ensure coherence, and a third party can provide neutral territory for information and data sharing to occur. Finally, funders can recruit more local funding support for ELOs, diversifying support to make for sustainable efforts.

Third-party intermediary organizations such as children's agencies, technical assistance providers or collective impact entities can provide the essential functions of coordination and mediation among many partners. The Coalition for New Britain's Youth helps to broker resources, training and continuous quality-improvement efforts for a diverse group of providers. In Boston, Boston Afterschool and Beyond has helped to create a common measurement framework across Boston Public Schools and CBO programs in addition to convening funders and participating in policy development. For more information on ELO system-building initiatives across the country, visit [Every Hour Counts](#).

3) Map the state policy landscape. Districts and their partners often find it challenging to understand the allowable uses and complex requirements for various flexible public funding streams. As demonstrated by the Hartford Foundation, foundations and other organizations can support efforts to map the available funding and policy landscape and develop shared priorities in the field for aligning and strengthening policies. These efforts can help providers prepare for and weather changes to state policy, such as possible elimination of Alliance funding and state after-school grants in Connecticut.

Statewide Afterschool Networks, now found in all 50 states, are an excellent resource for understanding state ELO context and policy opportunities. While each network varies in its mission and expertise, most will be able to provide an overview of the state's policy and funding landscape and the field's existing policy agenda. Visit the **Connecticut After School Network** for the latest news in the state.

4) Understand the national context.

Particularly as new state plans are drafted and considered under ESSA, funders and other entities interested in supporting and developing ELOs should stay connected to news on how the law is being implemented and what it might mean for the expanded learning field. In addition to policy analysis and updates, national organizations and initiatives may offer important research, professional learning and coalition-building opportunities. Districts and states can align work with national movements and policies to gain momentum.

There are several national organizations with expertise in ELO research, policy and quality, including the **Afterschool Alliance**, **National Afterschool Association** and **National Summer Learning Association**. Issue or sector-specific groups such as the **Campaign for Grade-Level Reading** and **Coalition for Community Schools** may also offer subject matter expertise and professional learning for districts and funders.

5) Capture your knowledge and learn from others.

Develop a plan for knowledge management at the outset of your ELO effort that includes both internal and external capture and dissemination opportunities. Remember, you are not the first to take this on; before reinventing the wheel, interview other funders, intermediary organizations and ELO leaders to glean important lessons and considerations. Once you are underway, join or form funding collaboratives or professional learning communities to share best practices and lessons learned. Many states and communities are exploring ELOs to advance a variety of goals related to literacy, youth employment, STEAM and college and career preparation. Determine whether local, state or national learning communities are most beneficial to your effort.

Grantmakers for Education is one example of a learning community for funders. The group meets regularly and collectively sets and implements a learning agenda, including commissioning research. Many similar regional, state and local groups exist across the country, typically related to education grant making.

Appendix

The following list includes all informants interviewed for this case study. Interviews took place between August 2016 and April 2017.

STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

Francis Apaloo, Education Consultant	Connecticut State Department of Education
Judy Carson, School-Community-Family Partnerships	Connecticut State Department of Education
John Frassinelli, Bureau Chief	Connecticut State Department of Education
Desi Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer	Connecticut State Department of Education
Marlene Padernacht, Education Consultant	Connecticut State Department of Education
Charlene Russell Tucker, Chief Operating Officer	Connecticut State Department of Education
Dianna Wentzell, Commissioner of Education	Connecticut State Department of Education

STATE EDUCATION SUPPORT OR ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

Dina Crowl, Superintendent of Schools	Capital Region Education Council
Sandy Cruz-Serrano, Deputy Executive Director	Capital Region Education Council
Greg Florio, Executive Director	Capital Region Education Council
Tim Nee, Assistant Executive Director	Capital Region Education Council
Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Executive Director	Connecticut After School Network
Laura Boutillier, Program Coordinator	Connecticut Center for School Change
Patrice Nelson, Program Coordinator	Connecticut Center for School Change
Katie Roy, Executive Director	Connecticut Center for School Finance
Jeff Villar, Executive Director	Connecticut Council on School Reform
Jennifer Davis, Senior Associate	Harvard Graduate School of Education

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Stacey McCann, Director of School Improvement and Intervention	Bloomfield Public Schools
Elisa Pierce, District Grant Specialist	Bloomfield Public Schools
James Thompson, Jr., Superintendent	Bloomfield Public Schools
Robin Lamott Sparks, Executive Director	Coalition for New Britain's Youth
Nathan Quesnel, Superintendent	East Hartford Public Schools
Nuchette Black-Burke, Coordinator, Community Schools	Hartford Public Schools
Tauheedah Jackson, Director, Hartford Partnership for School Success	Hartford Public Schools
Erin Benham, President	Meriden Federation of Teachers
Mark Benigni, Superintendent	Meriden Public Schools
Dan Coffey, Principal	Meriden Public Schools, Casimir Pulaski School
Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Associate Director	YWCA New Britain

FUNDERS

Maria Sanchez, Director of Grantmaking and Community Investment	American Savings Foundation
Sanjiv Rao, Program Officer	Ford Foundation
Sara Sneed, Director, Education Investments	Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Jim Ieronimo, Executive Director	United Way of Meriden and Wallingford

OTHER INFORMANTS

Moira Connelly	Massachusetts Dept. of Elem. & Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign
Kathleen Cross	Massachusetts Dept. of Elem. & Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign
Ruth Hersh	Massachusetts Dept. of Elem. & Secondary Education, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign

About Cross & Joftus

C&J supports nonprofit organizations, school districts, foundations and public-private partnerships to drive organizational improvements that ultimately increase student learning. We do this by implementing student-centered approaches; building strong leaders; creating coherence in systems; and supporting the effective implementation of reform strategies. A key focus of our work is assisting clients with finance and sustainability planning for wraparound services and expanded learning. For more information about C&J, visit our website: www.edstrategies.net

Support and guidance for this
case study provided by:

