

Currently, each of the pilot schools has an ELO team that is working on competency-based assessments that will allow them to grant credit for ELOs. Each school will develop an implementation plan to recruit students, who will design their ELOs with their advisors, a highly qualified teacher (HQT), and a community partner. Student learning will be assessed against pre-determined course-level competencies and credit will be granted by the HQT. The schedule calls for the schools to begin the process this summer. By December 2008, each school will have engaged approximately 80 students in earning credit towards high school completion through ELOs.

What does an ELO look like?

As an example of an Extended Learning Opportunity that might take place in a small New Hampshire high school, consider the following:

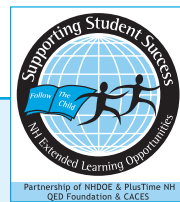
A student participates with the municipal engineering department to design and conduct a study of the structural integrity of bridges in the community. She assists in developing the presentation the department makes to the city council on the status of the bridges. Through her contributions to this project, community improvements are conducted.

Typically a student will need to conduct research to prepare for the hands-on nature of an extended learning opportunity and in order to set a clear direction for their experience. They will need to self-reflect on their learning, both academic and personal learning, throughout the course of their experience. A product, that demonstrates the student's application of the skills and knowledge attained is an important component, as this anchors the actual learning of the course competencies. And finally, a presentation or

exhibition of the entire learning experience verifies the extended learning opportunity and provides a dynamic venue for assessment.

➤ Conclusion

Extended Learning Opportunities are an exciting possibility for New Hampshire schools. They engage and enliven students and help them to find the relevance in their high school learning. Engaging in ELOs also assists teachers to design rigorous learning based on course-level competencies in a variety of creative and valid ways and allows them to facilitate learning for all students including underserved learners. Community engagement is enhanced by the connections with enthusiastic young learners and committed teachers. Everyone has a role to play and a stake in the outcomes of a learning community built on such vital components. New Hampshire is excited about and proud of its model of Extended Learning Opportunities.



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Supporting Student Success through Extended Learning Opportunities



A partnership of the New Hampshire Department of Education and PlusTime NH through a grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation

Too many students feel that the time they spend in classrooms has little relevance to their current realities or future prospects. Teachers struggle to teach academic subjects as well as real-world skills that students will need to succeed in life. Meanwhile, some segments of the student population remain underserved.

One solution to these challenges is Extended Learning Opportunities or ELOs. Extended Learning Opportunities allow students to gain knowledge and skills through learning that takes place outside of the traditional classroom. This can include—but is not limited to—independent study, private instruction, performing groups, internships, community service, apprenticeships, and online courses.

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“This grant and this new initiative will support our efforts to provide the opportunities necessary for more New Hampshire young people to receive a high school diploma”

- Gov. John Lynch

► What are the hallmarks of appropriate Extended Learning Opportunities?

They can be summed up in three words: rigor, relevance, and relationships.

Rigor

Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) are designed to meet high standards of academic rigor, by aligning learning with pre-determined course-level competencies. These standards are spelled out in local curriculum guidelines, national standards, and in New Hampshire's own standards and curriculum frameworks.

Beyond academic knowledge, rigorous ELOs help students develop everyday life skills such as problem-solving, team building, and time management. Successful ELOs include goals and expectations that are clearly spelled out and serve as a common target for students, staff, and parents. Regular assessments ensure that students are gaining competency in both academic and life-skill areas.

ELOs are not an easy way for students to gain credits, for schools to shuffle students out of the classroom, or for communities to replace classroom teachers. Nor are they designed for struggling students only. All students benefit from well-defined, rigorous learning opportunities.

Relevance

Students need to feel that what they are learning is relevant to real life. Well-

designed Extended Learning Opportunities allow students to engage in experiences that teach the skills they will need to succeed personally and professionally.

An important aspect of relevance is personalization, which ensures that ELOs are designed to address the learning styles, strengths, interests, and needs of each individual student. As such, ELOs may include individual and small or large group activities, with varying degrees of engagement, in a wide variety of settings—whatever it takes to engage the student in a course of study that is meaningful to them.

Relationships

In order to achieve relevance and personalization, ELOs must be based on strong relationships between students and their teachers, school administrators, parents, and communities. Studies have shown that personal relationships are crucial to successful learning. When these connections are made, they create a learning community in which everyone has a role to play and students are active participants in shaping their own learning experience.

► What are the practical applications of these principles?

The ideals of rigor, relevance, and relationships play out in a variety of practical ways.

It's about the students.

The process for developing successful ELOs is student-centered rather than adult-directed. It engages a student's passion and personal interests, as opposed to having

the student simply pick from a standardized menu of out-of-school activities. ELOs hold students to high standards of academic and personal development and base assessment on performance rather than simply the amount of time spent on an activity.

It's about teachers.

Teachers are crucial to the success of ELOs, in their development and in acting as mentors to students engaged in these learning experiences. For this reason, ELOs aim to enhance the role of teachers rather than diminish it. Teachers will be empowered to take a more active role in designing personalized learning experiences for students and working with community members to bring about those experiences. In this way, teachers become learning facilitators rather than taking on the entire responsibility for a student's educational experience.

It's about community.

In order for ELOs to succeed, we need to build bridges between our schools and communities. This involves identifying and training community partners to act as mentors to students and as partners to teachers. It means developing relationships that will result in rigorous, relevant ELOs. These are the collaborations that will make our communities into learning centers in which all members have a vital part.

Students involved with ELOs in their communities will not simply be going to an after-school job or working on projects in isolation. They will be engaging in experiential learning and applying that learning in a meaningful way to make a contribution to their world.

The pilot project

The state of New Hampshire has received a grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to conduct a pilot study of ELOs. The New Hampshire Department of Education and PlusTime NH (a nonprofit organization that provides support for afterschool programs) will use the grant to develop a model for Extended Learning Opportunities that can be used by high schools state-wide. The model will align with state education standards and give school systems a way to assess student learning so they can grant credit towards graduation for learning outside the traditional classroom.

Four schools have been chosen to participate in the study: Franklin High School, Laconia High School, Manchester Central High School, and Newfound Regional High School. Other schools will observe the planning process with an eye toward implementing Extended Learning Opportunities for their students in the near future: Farmington High School, Monadnock Regional High School in Swanzey, and Oyster River High School in Durham.

The goals of the study will be to:

- Pilot the use of developmentally appropriate Extended Learning Opportunities for all high school students and ensure that they are aligned with New Hampshire state standards.
- Demonstrate that Extended Learning Opportunities enrich and improve learning outcomes for underserved students
- Create a system that allows schools to provide students with credit toward high school completion for Extended Learning Opportunities outside of the traditional classroom.