

# NYSAN

NEW YORK STATE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

## TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON 2013-2014 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Our thanks to Senator Flanagan and Assemblymember Nolan, and to the other members of the Education Committees for the opportunity to present testimony to you today regarding the Executive Budget Proposal.

We are also grateful for your participation in the Governor’s Education Reform Commission, Senator Flanagan and Assemblymember Nolan. The Commission’s recommendations, and the translation of those recommendations in the Executive budget proposal, are a strong step forward toward more innovative solutions for the challenges that face our students. NYSAN is particularly excited that the Governor’s Education Reform Commission recognized the importance of extended learning time (ELT) and community schools, and that the Governor has recommended \$20 million and \$15 million, respectively, for these programs in his budget proposal. We hope that the Legislature will also support these proposals.

Both grant programs represent an opportunity to push further work that has been done by community organizations and school districts across New York State over the last two or more decades. Starting or growing extended learning time programs and community schools across the state will bring the benefits of expanded learning opportunities to more students and will foster ever closer collaborations between community partners and school districts.

Research has found that high-quality expanded learning opportunities offer students academic benefits including increases in test scores and achievement, improved attendance, and higher graduation and promotion rates. They have also demonstrated positive impacts on social-emotional development and decreases in risk behaviors. They bring to low-income students the kinds of enrichments that more affluent students have access to regularly – art, music and drama, hands-on science, organized sports, and service and career exploration opportunities – and are critical for positive youth development, for exposing students to role models and potential mentors, and for stemming summer learning loss.<sup>1</sup>

At NYSAN, we have tremendous respect for the daily miracles worked by teachers and schools. We believe that teachers and schools should be held to high standards, commensurate with their great responsibilities, but we also recognize that many students face challenges that are difficult

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the alignment between expanded learning opportunities and New York State’s school reform agenda and on the most recent research on the effectiveness of these programs, please visit [http://www.nysan.org/section/initiatives/elo\\_and\\_school\\_reform](http://www.nysan.org/section/initiatives/elo_and_school_reform).

for any teacher or school to overcome within the limits of the traditional school structure. We applaud the Commission's, and the Governor's, recommendations on ELT and community schools for recognizing that our students – and our teachers – deserve more support as they strive toward their learning goals.

NYSAN strongly supports the grant programs for ELT and community schools proposed in the Executive budget. We would recommend, however, that the Article VII language be revised to require school district applicants to have a community partner in order to be eligible for either program, to require enrichment activities as well as core academics, and to make multi-year grants to successful applicants. As the Governor said in his State of the State address, our students don't just need more, they also need better. More of the same is unlikely to reach students schools are already failing to reach, and may even further disengage them. Stable, enrichment-focused ELT and community schools programs run through a close collaboration between a school and a community partner are our best opportunity to give students more, better.

### *Community Partners*

Community partners are an essential element of successful community schools and ELT programs. They bring new resources into schools, which is particularly important given that the programs the Governor is proposing are intended to target some of the lowest performing schools in the state – schools whose resources are already below than their needs. Community partners have a track record of success – they have run similar programs at very high levels of quality for years or even decades across New York State.

The involvement of community partners will keep schools from having to reinvent the wheel as they seek to implement an ELT or community schools model. While ELT and community schools programs can be tremendous assets to schools, they also can be complicated to put in place. Everything from regulatory compliance with governing agencies like the Department of Health or the Office of Children and Family Services that are mostly unfamiliar to your average principal to the intricacies of scheduling thirty different activity options across a three-hour block of time will need to be carefully planned – and community organizations just down the street have already solved many of the challenges these new programs will face.

Community partners also bring community relationships and knowledge that can help schools more successfully engage families, a factor widely acknowledged as key in long-term change for students and schools. A community-based organization can be perceived as less intimidating than a school, and thus may serve as a more accessible entry point for parents. Many community-based organizations are also deeply connected to providers of other social services, so that even in an ELT model, a strong community partner can bring elements of the referral and connections services provided by community schools.

Finally, the focus of most community-based out-of-school-time providers is on enrichment and overall youth development, not solely on academics. These programs foster the non- or extra-academic skills, from art-making to perseverance, that recent research has identified as equally as important to life outcomes as purely academic knowledge. These programs also provide

opportunities for students to develop confidence in areas beyond the academic realm that translate into increased success in personal expectations and goal attainment.

### *Enrichment*

We also recommend that the additional learning time created by the ELT programs be required to be used to offer both enrichment and core academics. Enrichment activities have been shown to increase student engagement and motivation, met the needs of diverse learning styles, including students with disabilities, and help students develop ambitions for their futures. Enrichment activities can lend themselves to hands-on and project-based learning opportunities, and can offer opportunities to engage deeply with the critical thinking skills demanded by the Common Core.

Enrichment activities provided by community partners can ensure that students are receiving the recommended, or required, amounts of arts, science, and civics instruction, which have too often been dropped from the school day as schools face pressure to raise reading and math test scores. Community-based organizations can substantially enhance enrichment activities through their capacity to bring skilled professionals from the community into the school to offer their arts or STEM expertise to students.

### *Multi-Year Commitment*

Finally, we recommend that the state make a multi-year commitment to the selected grant recipients for both the ELT and community schools programs. Without that commitment, it is unlikely that many, if any, districts will be willing to commit to the comprehensive re-envisioning – of the school day and year and of the school as a community hub – that are intended by these grant programs.

Launching these initiatives will be a substantial undertaking in the selected districts, and achieving real success may take a year of planning and then a year or two of constantly-improved implementation, particularly for ELT. While working with experienced community partners may reduce the planning and implementation challenges, community partners do not have the financial reserves to invest in major new programs without a guarantee of multiple years of funding.

While we recognize the goal of sustainability embedded in these programs, sustainability will be difficult to achieve without enough funding to allow full implementation. Programs will need two or more years of full implementation to achieve the results that will convince school boards and community members to invest their scarce dollars in sustaining the program.

### *Extended School Day / School Violence Prevention*

I want to close by expressing appreciation for the continued funding of the Extended School Day / School Violence Prevention grant at \$24.3 million. ESD/SVP programs serve around 40,000 students at approximately 200 schools and community centers every year. This funding stream has supported innovative programs in-school, out-of-school, and across the intersection of the regular school day and the afterschool hours. These programs have helped lay the basis for the

Governor's new ELT proposal by supporting an array of programs across the state that have experience with a variety of extended day models.

ESD/SVP programs have been showing results, both academically and socio-emotionally. 100% of the students participating in the StarKids program in Buffalo advanced to the next grade, and they demonstrated an average of a 63% improvement in their ELA and math grades. Encompass in Rochester, which served only students with at least one risk factor for school failure, saw 95% of the students they work with advance to the next grade and a statistically significant improvement in the math test scores of their students in one year. 80% of StarKids students were reported by their teachers to have fewer behavior problems than before they joined the program and 95% of the students working with Encompass reported increased motivation and engagement with school. Recent research suggests that these social-emotional factors can have as large of a long-term impact on life outcomes as academic measures. School engagement and positive in-school behavior increase school attendance and reduce the risk of dropping out—as does advancing to the next grade on schedule.

ESD/SVP programs are also helping students at the personal level. Good Shepherd Services facilitates a peer mediation program in Brooklyn, where “Angel” was known as a difficult child who fought and argued with many of her peers as well as school officials. After a mediation session last year, she went on to complete the rest of the school year with few incidents. At the beginning of this year Angel volunteered to sign up and become a mediator herself, which the program staff see as a big step in a positive direction for Angel. So far she is improving her grades, behavior and interactions with everyone she comes in contact with.

These are only three of many success stories across the state where ESD/SVP funding has made a crucial difference in the lives of students, and ultimately in the communities that they inhabit. The stability of this funding stream over the last several years has been crucial, as programs have been able to build multi-year relationships with the students, schools, and families they serve. We are also grateful that the State has decided to extend the current contracts for one additional year so that the request for proposal process for the next round of funding can be conducted in the spring of 2014 without any conflict with the timing of other requests for proposals. Your support for ESD/SVP has been crucial, and we thank you on behalf of the 40,000 students across the state whose personal and academic growth you support.

*The New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) is a public-private partnership dedicated to promoting young people's safety, learning, and healthy development by increasing the quality and availability of programs available outside the traditional classroom. The positions taken and statements set forth in this document do not necessarily represent the views of all NYSAN members.*