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Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) and STEM: The Perfect Fit

A recent *Education Week* article, “Science by Stealth,” summed up the role of ELOs in Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM) learning:

“...afterschool programs offer an ideal setting for nurturing the potential scientist in every student, as well ...as reinforcing the science taught during the school hours. Compared to the school day, these programs’ smaller groups, longer time slots, and less formal settings provide opportunities for young people to visit museums, study neighborhood environments, cultivate gardens, perform field and laboratory experiments and have their love of discovery awakened in countless other ways.”

The case for including STEM learning in ELOs is strong.

- Expanding opportunities to learn key STEM concepts: studies show that STEM learning during the school day is necessary, but not enough to support STEM literacy.
- Supporting the STEM career pipeline: ELOs can play a key role in increasing the number of students following STEM academic and career paths at a time when the nation’s economy is becoming increasingly dependent on a STEM literate workforce
- Fostering diversity: ELOs serve high numbers of youth from populations underrepresented in STEM careers
- Beyond the big picture case, there are other benefits to providing high-quality STEM programming to youth through ELOs:
- Engaging, hands-on experiential learning curricula designed for youth of all ages and interests
- Providing opportunities to connect with STEM professionals as mentors and volunteers to work with students
- Involving community-based organizations and business to supplement learning and engage students
- Providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively to plan, investigate and communicate and include student-directed subject matter
- Creating links to the regular school day by inspiring youth, keeping them on a STEM path, and preparing them for high school learning and beyond

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