

H.270 - A Bill Relating to Increasing Expanded Learning Opportunities & Structuring the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund



Statement of purpose: To create an Expanded Learning Opportunities Grant Program developed and administered by an Expanded Learning Opportunities Review Committee to support and encourage increased student participation in and access to Expanded Learning Opportunities programs offered outside of school hours and during the summer throughout Vermont.

Background: The Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund (ELO SF) was created by the legislature in 2015 as part of Act 48. The purpose of the ELO SF is to expand access to programs that serve preK-12 children and youth outside the school day on a regular basis, including before and after school, school vacation weeks, and summer. No funding has yet been appropriated to the ELO SF.

In 2015, the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Working Group under the PreK-16 Council met to develop recommendations about how to use the ELO SF to increase access to Expanded Learning Opportunities for Vermont families, how to prioritize funding areas, and how best to oversee the ELO SF. This bill takes the recommendations of the ELO Working Group and would create a structure and process for the ELO SF grant program.

Specifically, the bill would do the following:

- Create the Expanded Learning Opportunities Review Committee to:
 - Collect information and data annually to determine the state and extent of ELOs in Vermont, including recommendations for how to leverage, integrate, and augment available federal, local and private dollars to meet the need for quality ELOs throughout Vermont.
 - Develop all aspects of an ELO Grant Program, including creating an application process, setting funding priorities, and determining criteria for evaluating applications and for awarding grants and other incentives, such as professional development.
 - Recommend to the Agency of Education grants to be awarded from the ELO SF (the Agency retains the right and power to award grants); work with the Agency to monitor the administration and implementation of the grants.
 - Work with philanthropic and business communities to pursue and accept grants or other funding from any public or private source for the ELO SF.
- Set overall priorities for the grant funding (although the committee outlined above still has some discretion for priorities). The priorities in the bill are:
 - Expand access to ELO programs for children and youth from low-income families
 - Expand programming in parts of the state where few or no ELO options are currently available
 - Expand access to ELO programs that build STEM skills or support career awareness and workforce readiness skills

- Require matching funds for funds awarded through the ELO SF Grant Program (in-kind match allowed)
- Require an annual report from grantees with a focus on Results Based Accountability (specific requirements to be developed by the ELO SF Review Committee with the Agency of Education and the Department for Children and Families)

Bill Findings:

1. Data collected nationally reveals that children and youth are most likely to be in or cause automobile accidents, commit crimes, be victims of crime, or engage in risky behavior between the hours of 3:00pm and 6:00pm.
2. Multiple national studies conclude that:
 - a. Students from families with low income regress academically and socially when they do not have access to the same types of learning experiences outside school hours and during the summer as more affluent students enjoy.
 - b. Afterschool and summer learning programs (ELOs) provide critical supports for children living in poverty, including access to healthy snacks and meals.
 - c. Afterschool and summer programs that specifically support students in building skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) help prepare youth for the jobs of tomorrow. In the past decade, total employment in the technology sector in Vermont increased seven times faster compared to growth in all other Vermont jobs, and STEM fields in life and physical science, engineering, and information technology occupations are growing at the fastest rates.
 - d. Twenty-four percent (24%) of Vermont kindergarten-grade 12 children are currently enrolled in ELOs. However, only 14% of Vermont children in an ELO after school program qualify for the federal free and reduced price lunch program, compared to 45% nationally.
 - e. The need for afterschool and summer programs is particularly high among working families. 33% of parents of Vermont children who are not currently enrolled in an ELO program report that they would enroll their child if a program were available. In addition, parents identify ELO program cost as one of the primary barriers to enrollment.
3. Research and analysis conducted by Vermont Afterschool, Inc., in 2014 estimates that for every dollar spent on quality ELO programs, Vermont could realize \$2.18 in long-term savings and benefits.