From Idea to Action: An Institute for Building Expanded-Learning Systems
March 26-27, 2015 | Oakland, CA

"Creating quality expanded learning at scale takes a coordinated approach." Nina Sonenberg of The Wallace Foundation opened Every Hour Counts' institute for building expanded learning systems with this key idea. For expanded learning systems to be successful, school districts, policymakers, providers, and communities must band together around a common vision. And, as Oakland Unified School District Superintendent Antwan Wilson shared, "In order for Oakland to be a district where every student thrives, we must leverage community partnerships… and ensure that those partnerships make a difference for our students."

Interest is growing around the country in developing coordinated expanded learning systems to expand students' access to high-quality learning opportunities and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive. Each community engaged in system-building brings distinct local assets, challenges, and historical context, from which we can learn a great deal to improve practices and policies.

On March 26-27, 2015, more than 140 people from 25 communities gathered in Oakland, CA, to discuss the essential elements of expanded-learning systems. Leaders in city-wide coordination presented workshops focused on three themes: system-building 101, sustainability, and data. Teams of stakeholders, primarily from the West Coast, shared their challenges, offered lessons learned, and began planning next steps to take home and implement in their communities. We were joined by a team from the Itaú Social Foundation and an NGO, CIEDS, who are looking to adapt the work of the Every Hour Counts partners in a few communities in Brazil. And, Grantmakers for Education (GFE) held a companion meeting to give funders a forum to discuss how they can catalyze quality improvement efforts at scale.

"From Idea to Action: An Institute for Building Expanded-Learning Systems" was hosted by Every Hour Counts, in partnership with the Partnership for Children and Youth, with generous support from The Wallace Foundation. This summary offers system-building strategies, best practices, and challenges that were discussed over the two-day Institute.

System-Building 101

Core Elements of Building a System

High-quality expanded learning systems have five core elements: a coordinating entity, high-quality age-appropriate activities, school and community partnerships, quality standards and assessment

tools connected to continuous improvement, and a participation tracking system. Many systems, when just getting off the ground, share a common staging process:

1) Engage in a planning effort linked to long-term policy goals
2) Find a home
3) Design a model
4) Reach consensus on quality standards, and the assessment tools to measure them
5) Analyze data to drive improvement

Candy Markman, Coordinator of the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA), walked us through the birth and evolution of the Nashville After Zone Alliance and provided advice on where to focus early wins and pitfalls to avoid when building a comprehensive expanded learning system. For communities just beginning to build a system, she advises that finding the right home for the system is one important early decision. There is no one-size-fits-all for this home, but it's important for a community to have an intermediary that is primarily focused on building expanded-learning system and bridging the public and private sectors. The intermediary serves as the engine that drives expanded learning system-building. Many successful system-building efforts have a lead non-profit intermediary at the core, but not all. When NAZA first formed, it was housed in the Office of the Mayor, which offered an invaluable bully-pulpit to build public interest, visibility, financial commitment to both programs and coordination, and clout to bring key stakeholders across the sectors to the table. Now, five years later, NAZA has moved to the Nashville Public Library, a transition that has helped NAZA develop more champions, sharpen their focus on literacy, and benefit from the library's many resources. The library also places NAZA in a home that can weather shifts in mayoral leadership.

For many communities just getting started in system-building, questions swirl about where to start and where to focus energy. For Nashville, they paid attention to three areas: the pipeline from early childhood to workforce and career; data-sharing between NAZA, the school district, and providers; and program quality. Candy provided advice to start on the right foot from the beginning, but most importantly she reminded us: "strong leadership can engage elected officials and business leaders, spread the good news about your system, and guide long-term sustainability. Nothing else can compensate for not having strong leaders at the table."

Improving Program Quality

Like Nashville, Prime Time Palm Beach County and the Providence After School Alliance (PASA) focused on program quality in the early stages of building their system, as high-quality programs is essential to get and keep students in the door and to maximize the benefits for children and families.

PASA has implemented the following six-step quality improvement process:

1) Set quality standards. Convene local stakeholders to come to a shared definition of program quality based on what exists and what is important in your community.
2) Agree on indicators for success at the youth, program, and system level.
3) Identify a tool to assess program quality that will allow you to collect data about your programs and create improvement plans.
4) Monitor program quality. PASA uses tools that allow for on-going data collection that include student participation monitoring, program quality observations, and self-reflective organizational assessments. Hillary Salmons of PASA advises: "Keep your customers and users in mind! Data should be easy to collect, immediately useful, and actionable."
5) Provide the support that programs need in order to improve such as coaching, communities of practice, and trainings aligned with the program quality assessment tools.
6) Improve and refine. In evaluation, think about outcomes at the system, program, and youth level. The Every Hour Counts Measurement Framework is a helpful blueprint. Evaluations should also be faithful to the original mission and be student-centered.

Prime Time Palm Beach County found that in order to support the continual improvement of their providers, even those that are advanced, they created a tri-level series of interventions for programs at the Entry, Intermediate, and Advanced/Maintenance levels. Prime Time has found that these levels increase capacity, recognize the high-flyers, and create flexibility.

Sustainability

"There is no formula for sustainability," imparted Jennifer Peck of the Partnership for Children and Youth. Organizations that wish to be truly sustainable need to find an operating structure that fits, build supportive partnerships, and engage in policy advocacy, all while continuing to deliver results for their communities. It's a tall order for any organization. Intermediaries that survive mayoral transitions and budget challenges always have an eye on sustainability. As Chris Smith of Boston After School & Beyond added, "To be sustainable is to evolve." Here are a few other key strategies for sustainability that we learned from the Every Hour Counts partners throughout the Institute:

Developing an Operating Structure that Works: Is there a right way to structure an intermediary? While the organizations in the Every Hour Counts coalition share a common purpose, they also represent a broad range of funding and operating structures. Some are funded nearly entirely with public funding, others rely heavily on private and philanthropic support. Some partners work exclusively in one city, others are county-or state-focused. They also each have a different comparative advantage in their community. Some prioritize capacity building, while others emphasize professional development and quality improvement or policy and research. The ideal operating and financing structure of an intermediary depends on many local and regional factors like the size of the community, the availability of philanthropic resources, and local community

priorities. Emerging systems should first clarify their values and their theory of change and identify their niche or "sweet spot" within the community to add distinct value.

Forging School and Community Partnerships: Lasting relationships with a school system are essential to help an intermediary achieve its goals and sustain progress over the long haul. For example, in 2012 the Family League of Baltimore implemented a new strategy that combined the city's Community Schools program with out-of-school-time programs. This alignment allows the Family League to share data between the school day and after-school, plan after-school activities in partnership with school day teachers, and implement joint planning between school day and out-of-school-time leaders. With tighter connections between schools and after-school providers, fewer children fall through the cracks. We learned that collaborative structures (like a joint Professional Learning Community), shared messaging, and an appreciation for flexibility have driven the Family League's school-community partnerships forward.

After School Matters (ASM) learned to seek out partnerships that were mutually beneficial. ASM partners with Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Park District, Chicago Public Library, Chicago Housing Authority, and the City of Chicago in addition to 160 community-based organizations. These partnerships allow ASM to maximize resources by providing access to program space, instructors, and meals. By forming strong relationships with leaders throughout the city, ASM created a wide base of champions for expanded learning. While turnover of school or district leadership can pose a challenge to system-building organizations, it doesn't have to threaten school and community partnerships. Many school staff stay on through mayoral and school board transitions. Intermediaries that create a broad base of support throughout organizations, not just at the top, are better poised to start off on the right foot through future leaderships transitions.

Building Strategies to Influence Policy: A core role of an intermediary is to translate community needs to local, state, and federal policymakers. Successful intermediaries always look for opportunities to share success stories, lessons learned, and tools with decision-makers and seek out ways to develop closer relationships. Because intermediaries naturally have ties to many stakeholders, they can often convene organizations together in mutually beneficial and reinforcing ways. Building a culture of policy advocacy at an intermediary involves not just reaching out to policymakers, but also communicating the value of the intermediary to youth, providers, and families, as well as the general public, who can rally for support for expanded learning. Tips for advocacy success include:

- Build a group of community organizations to help rally for policy change.
- Ensure that partners who work directly with youth get credit and recognition for their efforts.
- Rely on your board of directors as experts, allies, and thought partners to weather political changes.
- Provide research, evaluation, and data that can inform policymakers of the need for expanded learning in your community.

- Use your deep knowledge of the work on the ground to be a valued partner to policymakers.

Data

"Data collection must be relevant to your outcomes and have your youth in mind."— Hillary Salmons, Providence After School Alliance.

The use and analysis of high-quality data drives an expanded learning system and is key to effective decision-making. How can city systems ensure that they are collecting sufficient, but not redundant data that is meaningful to their goals? Participants explored different angles of the data collection and use process: the intersection of program quality and youth outcomes; data sharing; organizational logic models; and youth participatory action research.

The Intersection of Program Quality and Youth Outcomes: The Providence After School Alliance and Boston After School & Beyond developed sophisticated data systems that track educator- and youth-rated competencies by program, so they can assess program strengths and weaknesses. These data tools allow them to see how the programs are doing system-wide and how program strengths connect to youth outcomes. One main takeaway was the critical importance of using assessment tools that fully integrate the youth perspective to understand how they perceive program quality. It's important to capture youth satisfaction in an assessment tool because if students are bored or disengaged in a program, regardless of if adults have assessed the program highly, students will stop attending.

Data Sharing: In Nashville, connecting school and NAZA data systems together began as an effort to identify the students who were at risk of dropping out. Coordinating efforts between schools, expanded learning providers, and other community service providers increased the odds that students have the supports they need to graduate and succeed. Data-driven decision-making increases efficiency, as people, resources, and time are not wasted and services can be tailored to student needs. But coordination requires clear communication between all parties.

A major lesson from NAZA's experience was that data systems consist not just of technology, but also of the people and processes that analyze the data and give it meaning. Establishing a shared vision for the outcomes that the data sharing will achieve is the first step. Intermediaries should establish strong relationships with the school district and other important decision-makers and develop clear processes for how all parties will work together. Once all parties have a shared vision of the "big picture," it's easier to dig into the weeds on data.

Organization Logic Models: Designing or revamping a logic model can be a powerful tool for organizations looking to boost their impact. Logic models force communities to ask tough questions: where are we now, is our present situation adequate, what are the obstacles, where do we want to go, what do we have to do to get there? Logic models also offer communities a

common language and reference point for everyone involved in an initiative and serve as the basis to determine priorities. After School Matters (ASM) shared strategies for building logic models that truly drive change. They advised communities interested in undergoing this process to build a coalition of partners who will offer guidance to your organization in the design of the logic model. ASM also advised approaching the process with honesty and humility and to look for lessons in both past successes and failures.

Youth Participatory Action Research: Building an effective system requires working with and listening to the people most impacted. Youthprise has recently begun to engage in Youth Participatory Action Research in which young people are actively engaged as researchers around issues that affect their communities. For Youthprise researchers, this involved changing their view of young people as merely the subject of research to them as the researchers around issues of racism, sexism, and classism. Youthprise espouses that if you're not engaging youth in building your expanded learning system, you're selling yourself—and the youth of your community—short. For Youthprise, treating youth like experts has driven their research and data collection in dynamic new directions by helping them to refocus their initiatives on what young people truly value as important to creating success in their own lives.

Special Topics

Grasstops and Grassroots: Moving Quality, Policy, and Action Among Field Practitioners and Statewide Leaders: City and state leaders often work together to leverage resources, improve quality, and find opportunities to join forces in advocacy efforts. In this session, we heard from Jeff Davis of the California After-School Network on how state and regional efforts capitalize on and complement each others' strengths. As one example, state and local leaders can collaborate to push forward policy change. The Partnership for Children and Youth engages both grasstops leaders (policymakers and school boards) and grassroots leaders (youth and families) at the state and local levels to shore up support for expanded learning. They engage with their statewide advocacy partners, gather input from local expanded learning providers, and manage the negotiation of details between partners, legislators, and field interests. The Partnership for Children and Youth emphasizes that strong links to the providers on the ground are essential to remain authentic to field needs.

Building Summer Systems: Summer learning should address the knowledge, skills, and experiences young people need to succeed. Boston After School & Beyond (BASB)'s Summer Learning Project unites summer learning providers from around the city of Boston around common measurements of social-emotional power skills (critical thinking, perseverance, relationships, and self-regulation) that are associated with college and career success. In the Boston Summer Learning Project, Boston Public Schools teachers and community-based non-profit staff co-develop, co-manage, and co-deliver a 5-6-week program. BASB also works with a wider variety of summer learning programs in the city to measure their program quality in a standard way. From BASB's perspective, the diversity of programs is a major strength of the model. Since students arrive with diverse

backgrounds and needs, only diverse providers can make headway in meeting those needs. Providers have flexibility in their implementation, but participate in a common evaluation process which allows BASB to compare programs across the four power skills.

ExpandED Schools: Piloting an Expanded-Day Model: Lucy Friedman of TASC (The After-School Corporation) offered an inside look at TASC's ExpandED Schools model. With more time for both academics and enrichment, and a school and community staff that work together and share resources, ExpandED Schools offer students personalized and hands-on learning opportunities. These practices have led to improved academic performance and school culture compared to other schools in New York City and are viewed as more engaging by parents, students, and teachers. TASC's District Readiness Tool can help communities assess their leadership, partnerships, data systems, and other resources to see whether they are ready to expand the school day.