

A photograph of a male teacher with glasses and a blue shirt, wearing a grey and white checkered vest, leaning over a table. He is interacting with two young students, a girl with curly hair on the right and a boy on the left. They are looking at small cards or photos on the table. The background shows a classroom with wooden cabinets and shelves.

Improving Professional Practice of Afterschool Staff

2016 ELO Quality Initiative Evaluation Study
Learning Brief for Frontline Staff

The Expanded Learning Opportunities Quality Initiative is a statewide effort to build comprehensive learning system that emphasizes quality from birth to 18 years. Raikes Foundation, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) funded the 2016 – 2017 ELO quality evaluation study which included fifty afterschool programs from four counties (King, Pierce, Spokane, and Walla Walla). The study conducted by the University of Washington, Cultivate Learning explored the baseline ELO quality in the fifty programs and examined the impact of improvement efforts such as weekly coaching and ongoing training opportunities. The following is a brief overview, lessons learned, and practical tips for frontline staff working in ELO programs.

A complete overview of the research questions and findings are published at Sparkwindmovement.org and can be found [here](#).

Program Staff's Feedback on Improving Program Quality

Defining Quality

Engaging in ongoing trainings and having program wide conversation on program quality through PQA basics and coach meetings helped programs develop a common "quality" vocabulary. Programs were able to see how aspects of program offering align with quality standards of the PQA.

Quality Frequent Coaching

Program staff and directors agreed that coaching helped programs translate "quality practice" to everyday practice. Programs also expressed a desire for more frequent observation and feedback from coaches.

Involving Program Leaders

When coaches were able to include program leadership in ongoing coaching (goal setting and data reviewing), sites were able to collaborate more and resolve issues sooner. Coaches also expressed sites where directors were involved had more progress and program wide quality improvement.

Value of Online Coaching:

Program staff and coaches regard online coaching as having potential, but more support is required for coaches and program staff to use the online Coaching Companion tool.

Address barriers to quality improvement

Continued barriers to improving quality are high rates of staff turnover, swing shifts (morning and after school), and staffing with volunteers.

Resources Needed to Improve Quality in ELO Field

Provide accessible, short training resources to program teams

Having a video library of quality programs exemplars would be very helpful to show staff what high-quality interactions look like in other programs. In addition ongoing, brief, training sessions, based on quality program practice would benefit staff by giving them the flexibility to learn necessary skills from a video based lesson they can watch at any time.

Regional community meetings provide opportunity for networking and learning

Program staff remarked the potential of learning in networks or cohorts. Program staff wanted opportunity to learn from other programs near and far to share how they each addressed quality improvement efforts, used resources, and build agendas around their needs.



"When we meet so often to coach, the directors have gotten involved in the coaching sessions. They are building relationship with staff. When the direct staff is frustrated with things, and saying I can't reach my goal because of this and that, the director says, well I can make that change for you."

COACH

"I feel that the progress that [we] made over the course of the year has been great and we constantly have conversations about how PQA is taking over my brain and everything I do."

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

"I just know how valuable it's been to be filmed... For us to look at [ourselves] was really awesome. Very powerful. I loved it."

PROGRAM STAFF

"Even when our coach isn't there, I can continue to help and support the staff who is being coached."

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

COMING SOON

ELO Quality Initiative partners are working to implement the following.

- 1. Two-Minute Tips:** are biweekly email blasts with quick research-based strategies for ELO professionals with a short video of the strategy in action.
- 2. Video Resource Library:** short best- practice exemplary videos of staff interacting with children and youth.
- 3. Continuation of Evaluation Study to year 2017 – 2018:** to learn more about impact of coaching on program quality.
- 4. Coaching:** customized coaching and training support to programs.
- 5. Coaching Companion Trainings:** to support staff in navigating online coaching tools and resources.