

THE GOVERNOR'S SUMMIT:

Leading for Learning: Creating A Vision for Extra Learning Opportunities in Pennsylvania

On March 1, 2006 over 150 educators, advocates, and state government officials' gathered to discuss the importance of Extra Learning Opportunities (ELO). The Governor's Summit entitled, Leading for Learning: Creating a Vision for Extra Learning Opportunities in Pennsylvania was sponsored by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in partnership with the National Governor's Association and the Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network. The Summit provided a platform by which stakeholders could galvanize momentum for creating a comprehensive, statewide policy agenda.

Governor Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania sent out over 400 invitations to business leaders, afterschool advocates, researchers, educators, foundations, policy-makers and faith-community-based organizations to express his commitment toward ELO initiatives. "This is an investment in children who need a safe place to go once the school day ends," Governor Rendell said. "Instead of hanging out on the corner, students will be able to make friends, improve their academics and just have fun."

The Governor's Summit highlighted the variety of promising ELO approaches that have developed across the Commonwealth. The attendees were encouraged to help Pennsylvanians mobilize schools, communities, private sector and social/ health services support and resources in order to remove barriers that impede students from learning.

Featured speakers included: Mayor Stephen Reed of Harrisburg, Secretary Gerald Zahorchak, Pennsylvania Department of Education; Secretary Donna Cooper, Governor's Office of Policy and Planning; and Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter, Office of Child Development, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.

"I think the best part of the summit was the opportunity to hear leaders and professionals in the field provide information on the value of afterschool programming," remarked a participant.



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The Governor's Summit also featured a panel of speakers with both state and national perspectives, including one of the country's leading researchers on afterschool, Deborah Lowe Vandell, University of California– Irvine. Dr. Vandell provided the audience with recent research documenting the value of afterschool programs to positive youth development. In her presentation, Dr. Vandell noted that current research indicates that afterschool programs have greater effects on low-income children, children with limited English language skills and low achieving students.

Dr. Vandell was also joined by An-Me Chung, a program officer with the Mott Foundation; Peter Eldridge, a senior education program specialist with the U.S. Department of Education; Ayeola Fortune, Project Director of the Extended Learning Opportunities and Development Project, the Council of Chief State School Officers; Nathaniel Gadsden, Founder and Pastor of Imani African Christian Church; Jay Leff, President of the National Youth Rights Association Vermont chapter; Christine Munchak, President of Pennsylvania PTA; Anita Smith, President and CEO of Capital BlueCross; and David Spotts, Chief of Police for Mechanicsburg.

As the Summit came to a close, Joan Benso, President and CEO, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children encouraged the attendees, "Make a commitment to join existing efforts to expand and improve out-of-school time activities for all Pennsylvania's youth."

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