Building upon a decade of quality improvement work in Washington, the Expanded Learning Opportunities Quality Initiative (ELOQI) launched during the 2016–17 school year to provide the support needed to ensure that expanded learning programs can deliver the type of high-quality engagement proven to result in meaningful youth-level outcomes. ELOQI is a joint effort of School's Out Washington (SOWA); Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF); Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI); Child Care Aware (CCA); and Cultivate Learning, University of Washington.

**Building and Growing Quality: 2016 – 2019**

Over the past three years, the initiative has aimed to create a streamlined system of supports, including assessment, coaching and training, for program staff to engage children and youth with developmentally appropriate strategies. Partnering organizations have further explored strategies to connect “systems,” specifically the early learning and school-age systems, to assure more coordinated and aligned supports for children and youth.

This quality work is aligned to the Washington State Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards that were based on research designed by the expanded learning field and other stakeholders. Over the past three years, all programs have participated in the Youth Program Quality Intervention, a continuous improvement process developed by David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. Programs in Washington have been using the Weikart Center’s Program Quality Assessment (PQA) tools to assess program quality levels for youth services that are safe, supportive, interactive, and engaging. This process includes observational self and external assessments, trainings, peer learning communities, and practice-based coaching sessions.

**ELO Quality Initiative Fast Facts**

**Expanded Learning Opportunities**
After school and summer programs that engage young people in high quality enrichment, academic support, and overall development vital opportunities to help them learn and grow outside the school day.

**Youth Program Quality Intervention**
A research-based continuous improvement process shown to improve program quality and youth outcomes that involves a cycle of Assess, Plan, and Improve which includes coaching, training, and peer-to-peer learning.

**Improvements Made**
- Improving Youth Outcomes: Youth participating in a majority of program hours had better engagement with school and increased attendance.
- Improved Quality: In 2019, 80% of programs saw significant improvement. The greatest gains were in the Engagement Domain, which contain the highest levels of quality practices.
- Leveraging private funding with a match from four private funders.
- Served over 100 programs directly through the initiative, and leveraged the infrastructure supports to serve another 525 programs across the state.
Beginning in the second year, programs began using a new Social Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment (SEL PQA) tool, which allowed programs to focus more explicitly on practices that promote social-emotional learning skills such as emotion management, problem-solving, and teamwork. Additional supports were provided, including new SEL-specific Youth Work Methods trainings and more tailored online professional development resources (including 2-minute tips), and developed in partnership with Cultivate Learning.

Through the ELOQI, two evaluation studies were completed by the University of Washington’s Cultivate Learning to examine program quality and the impact of improvement efforts, including various coaching intervention levels. Findings from the research were also utilized to support the development of the Quality Seal. The Quality Seal assessment is based on Washington State Program Quality Standards, the Program Quality Assessment (PQA), and leading research. It is designed to be a benchmark of quality after an expanded learning program has worked with their coach using the PQA to improve the process, structure, and practices of their program.

West Central Community Center - Spokane

Located in one of the highest poverty communities in Washington State, West Central Community Center (WCCC) serves a critical role supporting children and families in the West Central and Emerson Garfield neighborhoods of Spokane. Through their youth development program, which includes before and afterschool, and summer programming, WCCC provides a variety of enrichment and experiential programming from clubs and sports to arts and crafts, educational support, life skills and drug and alcohol prevention. The staff pride themselves on being positive role models and making a lasting impression on the youth who participate. WCCC joined a cohort of organizations in Spokane County taking part in the ELOQI. Though familiar with SOWA’s trainings and professional development services, Rick Harris, Recreation and Facility Manager, felt a little hesitant at first about the commitment involved in the year-long quality improvement process. After conversations with Benjamin Baird, SOWA’s Spokane Program Quality Manager, Rick and Felicia Parke, who leads the youth development programs, were convinced this was something they wanted to be a part of, recognizing the potential benefits for the staff, youth, and families.

“I've discovered that being a part of this quality improvement process takes a little pressure off supervisors because we have experts from the outside coming in, teaching, evaluating, guiding, and mentoring,” explains Rick Harris. “It's an eye opening experience having that outside perspective and we are excited to see how our staff will improve their interactions with the kids in our program.”

The first step of the process includes an assessment which provided clarity for WCCC staff around areas to work on when it comes to improving youth interaction and youth engagement. Now the staff are receiving ongoing coaching and training to work toward the goals they developed with guidance and support from School's Out Washington.
Leveraging lessons learned and research findings from the previous three years, partners of the Expanded Learning Opportunities Quality Initiative will continue to support programs in their quality improvement efforts in 2019-2020 with new social-emotional learning trainings, two-minute tips, and ongoing professional development for program staff and coaches (modeling a parallel process of continuous improvement).

**Intervention Design based on balance of research and needs of providers:**
Three levels of support are delivered based on program’s previous participation in ELOQI, SEL PQA, and Quality Seal assessment data; organizational factors, including staff turnover and space challenges; and in consideration of staff and program needs.

- Programs that are new to the ELOQI and programs that have had significant changes receive the highest amount of in-person coaching hours.

- Programs that have participated previously, but have not achieved higher levels of quality, continue to receive enough in-person and virtual coaching to support consistent, regular supports for improvement over the course of the year.

- Programs that have achieved a high level of quality and have had few or no changes will receive the lowest amount of direct supports, with three in-person touch points over the course of the year and up to ten virtual coaching sessions, intended to help these programs sustain quality practices and support continuous improvement.

**Engaging New Partners and Expanding Existing Partnerships:**
The ELO Quality Initiative is engaging in several new projects across the state, below are a few examples.

- The Zone Project focuses on the Hillyard neighborhood in northeast Spokane, an underserved and low-income area of the city where more than four in five children receive free or reduced price lunches. Providers are receiving funding to expand their expanded learning programs in the neighborhood through an investment from the Ballmer Group, and they receive quality improvement support through the ELO Quality Initiative.

- In partnership with OSPI, we are building the capacity of 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a federally funded ELO program serving 16,000 children and youth in the state, to build a coaching cadre. 21st Century staff are being trained by SOWA to offer individual site coaching and regional group coaching to 21st Century providers across the state.

- In addition to non-child care ELOs and children in licensed school-age only programs, there are thousands of students in 0-12 child care centers and family homes that are a part of Early Achievers, the early learning quality system. That system was not built for school-age kids and their providers, so SOWA and the ELOQI planning team are working with Child Care Aware of Washington to design a complimentary model to provide coaching, training, and assessment to 0-12 child centers and family homes that have school-age children. This partnership has been growing since the beginning of the ELOQI with Early Achievers coaches and SOWA coaches frequently strategizing and supporting each other in their work, as well as through deeper partnerships among system leaders.

**The Magic of Coaching**
Along with assessment, training, and learning communities, coaching is a key component to the quality improvement framework and is often the highest rated quality activity from providers. The discipline of coaching can be summed up by two coaches themselves.

“Coaching is really the essence of meeting people where they’re at and creating spaces that enable us to have thoughtful conversations about what a program needs,” explains Maria Johnson, our youth program quality coach coordinator in Spokane. “It’s all about respecting the culture of a program for what it is, identifying what’s working well and creating opportunities to grow.”

Sebastian Wilson, on one of his coaching relationships, “Wow, I get to work with this incredible person who has so many great things going on. I know I’m going to learn as much as I can teach. I’m going to gain as much as I can give.”
Responsiveness to the Field:

- Virtual Coaching. We have expanded the definition of virtual coaching to include real-time video platforms such as Skype and FaceTime, texts, Google Apps, and email, in addition to the Coaching Companion. The expansion of virtual coaching means that coaches can connect with providers in the way it works best for them and with tools they’re most comfortable.

- More Resources and Opportunities for Peer-Learning. We have added two additional learning community meetings (LCMs) this year for a total of five. Based on feedback, three of the LCMs will include new SEL Methods Workshops including a specific training on adult SEL skills. One of the learning community meetings will focus on providing opportunities for staff to practice specific PQA practices with each other and receive feedback/support from the trainer and coaches in real-time. This model was tested last year with great success and positive feedback.

Looking Ahead: 2020 and Beyond

The ELOQI partners in collaboration with providers look to expanded quality supports to more providers in more parts of the state. This would include growing partnership opportunities with small and large ELOs as well as with the OSPI 21st Century Community Learning Centers. With additional funding, we look to expand the partnership with Child Care Aware and working with center-based and family home child care that are involved with Early Achievers. Additionally, the ELOQI partners want to work with DCYF to work provide a set of quality supports to programs that are specifically-designed to work with foster youth and adjudicated youth to ensure that those youth are supported all day and all year along with helping achieve DCYF child and youth outcome goals.

THE STANDARDS: 9 DOMAINS

**Safety and Wellness**
Quality programs provide safe, healthy, and developmentally appropriate learning environments for all participants.

**Cultural Competency and Responsiveness**
Quality programs respect and are responsive to the diversity of program participants, their families, and community.

**Relationships**
Quality programs develop, nurture, and maintain positive relationships and interactions among staff and participants.

**Youth Leadership and Engagement**
Quality programs promote a sense of purpose and individual empowerment in youth through opportunities to engage in a rich variety of experiences, participate in planning, and exercise choice and leadership.

**Program and Activities**
Quality programs offer a variety of activities that are active, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive and enrich the physical, social, emotional, and creative development of all participants.

The Washington State Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards* have nine overarching domains. Together, they represent the key areas of quality for afterschool and youth development programs.

**Assessment, Planning and Improvement**
Quality programs have policies and procedures in place that promote continuous improvement.

**Ongoing Staff and Volunteer Development**
Quality programs ensure competent, motivated, youth-centered staff and volunteers through effective orientation, training, and a philosophy that views professional development as a journey rather than a destination.

**Leadership and Management**
Effective organizations have a coherent mission, well-developed systems, and sound fiscal management to support and enhance quality programming and activities for all participants.

**Family, School and Community Connection**
Quality programs establish and maintain strong, working partnerships with families, schools, and community stakeholders.

*Learn more about the Washington State Afterschool and Youth Development Quality Standards: https://www.schoolsoutwashington.org/pages/quality-standards

For more information regarding Expanded Learning Opportunities or the ELOQI, please contact SOWA Policy & Advocacy Director David Beard at DBeard@schoolsoutwashington.org.