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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

# Extending, Accelerating, & Connecting Learning:

A CASE STUDY OF AKRON'S PIONEERING  
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

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## Executive Summary

In response to the standards-based reform models accompanying the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, dedicated, hard-working educators and their school-based partners have worked diligently to implement mandated and recommended reforms. In Ohio as well as in other states, these reform models have helped educators focus on new priorities and develop new capacities. As a result, some of their outcomes have improved.

Unfortunately, not all of the desired outcomes have improved. Schools and districts with funding shortfalls, high staff turnover, and those with high poverty populations have had difficulty reaching performance expectations as manifested in adequate yearly progress.

Clearly, standards-based reforms, while essential, are not enough. These walled-in, building centered improvement models focus almost exclusively on the regular school day. They do not enable educators and their school-based colleagues to gain influence and control over students' out-of-school time (OST). The net effect is that educators, schools, and districts are not able to tap family and community resources to address two inseparable priorities. The first priority is to address external barriers to learning, healthy development and success, especially barriers that prevent all students coming to school ready and able to learn. The other priority is to maximize learning opportunities during OST, especially opportunities that can be connected to, and integrated with, school-based learning.

In brief, OST initiatives, programs and services effectively expand existing school and district improvement models. These expanded models address the missing components in standards-driven improvement models. More than this, the best expanded models reinforce and advance standards-based reform models. This strategic expansion happens when OST learning and healthy development are firmly connected to school-based learning and academic-behavioral interventions. In the best case scenario, educators, other human service providers, families, governmental officials, postsecondary education representatives, and private sector leaders develop common purposes in support of young people, schools and whole systems education reform sometimes called "PK-16" or more simply, birth to career education reform.

As recognition of the enormous potential for expanded improvement models encompassing OST grows, the search for effective, innovative exemplars has accelerated. National foundations such as the C.S. Mott Foundation and the Wallace Foundation have provided leadership. With state governmental and educational policy leaders, foundation leaders have looked for states ready to advance this new century improvement agenda and provide exemplars other leaders can adopt and amend.

Ohio is a prime candidate, owing to the work of its governments, The Ohio Department of Education, the state's foundation community, and visionary local leaders. To learn more about Ohio's innovative OST and expanded school/district improvement models, two related evaluations were commissioned. The first focused on a resource map for OST funding (Wade-Mdivanian, et al., 2009). The complete report is available on our website: [www.csw.osu.edu/cayci](http://www.csw.osu.edu/cayci).

The second study provided an in-depth exploration of innovations undertaken by a representative urban school district, together with the city and the county. Thanks to pioneering leaders and multiple innovations, Akron Ohio's school-community configuration was selected.

A team of researchers from the Ohio State University (OSU) College of Social Work designed the study with guidance from Akron's leadership and also from experts state-wide. The following executive summary provides relevant details about this study's methods and findings.

The Akron case study pays special attention to OST-related learning, especially learning that is organized and mobilized as a potent school and district improvement resource. It focuses on three inseparable kinds of learning. *Extended learning* occurs outside the regular school day. *Accelerated learning*, both in school and during OST, speeds up learning and content mastery. *Connected learning* brings both accelerated and extended learning back to classrooms, supporting students and teachers alike.

In short, Akron's OST initiatives showcase the power of a three-component trilogy: Expanded, accelerated, and connected learning. The full report describes relevant examples, as it also describes how some programs and services combine two or more kinds of learning. Key findings include the following examples:

- Akron's leaders have developed innovative programs and services that exemplify the potential and power of extended, accelerated, and connected learning, demonstrating how this learning can be an integral, essential component of expanded school improvement.
- Akron's universal programs and services reach an impressive number of young people and show promising outcomes for students who attend regularly.
- Teachers, especially teachers involved in OST programs and services, report the benefits of expanded school improvement initiatives.
- There is some evidence that Akron's OST initiatives benefit parents. For example, they enhance parent-school relationships via improvements in parent involvement programs.
- Leaders attribute increases in student achievement and improved behavioral outcomes to expanded, accelerated, and connected learning.
- Akron's leaders have discovered and developed innovative ways to fund extended, accelerated, and connected learning opportunities and have prioritized funding for the future.

Nothing as bold and creative as Akron's pioneering school-community initiatives can succeed without infrastructure supports. For example, leadership, funding alternatives, operational quality control mechanisms, and professional development are practical necessities.

Notwithstanding these notable achievements and promising innovations, Akron's leaders report that they still have plenty of work to do. Progress can still be made in relation to enhancing academic achievement and school success across the community. Some of this work entails addressing enduring challenges, especially funding and infrastructure-related challenges. Some such work entails anticipating future challenges.

Early evaluations, including this one, attest to the innovative nature of Akron's work and provide promising indicators of progress and success. Although more evaluations are needed, already it is apparent that Akron's leaders have provided an exemplar for others in Ohio and elsewhere. Important for educational leaders and community leaders alike, Akron's exemplary work has profound implications for state policy and the leaders responsible for it.

Above all, the work reported here and within the full report will have achieved its most important aim if it enables educators and their OST partners to improve outcomes for young people, in turn improving the overall performance profiles of schools and districts. As Governor Ted Strickland recently has proclaimed, Ohio's immediate economic needs, social development, and civic engagement depend in fundamental respects on a new, expanded approach to education. The pioneering work of Akron surely represents the kind of creative, innovative school and educational work that Ohio's Governor had in mind.

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