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 Quality Improvement — Supporting Frontline Staff

Program Quality Improvement
Program staff improved certain aspects of their practice and program quality increased when provided with professional development and support through Practice-Based Coaching. Of the programs examined, those with more frequent access to coaching, faithfully adhering to the Practice-Based Coaching Model, showed greater improvement. ELO programs that were initially lower-quality made the greatest gains.

Leadership Support
Program staff in the study stated that the participation of directors in program quality was vital to improvement efforts. ELO program leaders involved in the coaching and improvement process were better able to accommodate potential interferences with normal programming, and could help align professional goals program-wide. Some site directors also explained that their involvement gave them the power to help staff improve independently of the normal coaching process.

Paid Time for Professional Development
While recognizing the fiscal limitations of many ELO programs, pilot participants strongly recommended having dedicated, paid time for program staff to engage in coaching and other forms of professional development. Having ongoing professional development and training as a requirement of ELO staff positions can help staff improve, and can increase the quality of an ELO program.

Resource Library
Frontline ELO program staff would benefit from having access to a resource library of videos, articles, and other resources that assist in program improvement. Once they became focused on improving their practice, pilot program frontline ELO staff advocated for more resources on specific effective strategies for ELO programming and examples from other frontline staff on how they created high-level ELO programming.

Youth Voice
When asked simple, specific questions about their ELO programs, children and youth provided clear and precise assessments of their program’s specific strengths and shortcomings. ELO site directors and other leadership staff can take steps to improve the quality of their program by involving youth in designing the ELO program, and by routinely soliciting youth feedback on the effectiveness of programming. This precise feedback can help ELO leaders choose specific areas of ELO practice on which frontline staff should focus in their coaching and other professional development efforts.

COMING SOON
ELO Quality Initiative partners are working to implement the following.

1. Continuation of Evaluation Study to year 2017 – 2018: to learn more about impact of coaching on program quality.

2. Two-Minute Tips: are biweekly email blasts with quick research-based strategies for ELO professionals with a short video of the strategy in action.


4. Coaching: customized coaching and training support to programs.

5. Youth advisory panel: a group of youth from King and Pierce county will be convened to provide input on best practice staff youth interaction videos to build the resource library.