



## The Explore & Learn Portal

### Linking Teachers to Authentic Learning Opportunities in the Community

The Community Classroom Consortium seeks to establish a systematic and uniform mechanism for connecting teachers with qualified non-formal education providers in the community. The “Explore & Learn Portal” will link teachers to inspiring, real-world learning experiences that closely align with and enrich the curriculum and address the priorities of participating school districts. The web portal is based -- in part -- on a model successfully established in Sarasota County Schools (<http://edexploresrq.com/>). The creation of the Explore & Learn Portal has three broad goals: 1) increase student achievement by systematically connecting teachers with high quality non-formal education providers in the community, 2) simplify, standardize and increase the equity of access to community learning resources, and 3) document and share the lessons learned with other school districts around the state.

The website itself is an online database that teachers search for relevant non-formal education program services and content from CCC membership in the region. Teachers can search for programs or professional development opportunities by subject, grade, standard, time of year, cost, and format/type of program. Teachers will also be able to apply for grant funding and submit evaluations of the providers they access. School administrators will be able to track school and classroom level usage of non-formal education programs. District curriculum specialists will be able to review teacher evaluations. Finally, teachers will be able to use the portal to apply for grant funding to cover the cost of certain programs.

Research shows informal education institutions such as those represented by the CCC are often better able to inspire, engage, motivate and transform learning for a large number of students. Based on the results of a recent survey of LCS teachers and administrators, the collaboration between schools and informal education institutions is desirable. Unfortunately, it is also unsystematic, un-managed, not driven by data, poorly aligned with content and progression, and unequally distributed across schools, grades and subjects.

The Explore & Learn Portal will accomplish the following objectives:

1. Increase and simplify access for teachers to the full range of non-formal education providers.
2. Establish a systematic and objective mechanism for providing mini-grants to teachers.
3. Clarify and reinforce the policies of participating school districts regarding partnerships with non-formal education providers.
4. Strengthen the alignment of programs with the academic priorities of curriculum specialists.
5. Generate data to support:
  - a. Teachers, to help them select the highest quality and most cost effective programs.
  - b. School and district administrators, to ensure that partnerships are based on need and accessed equitably across schools in the district.
  - c. Non-formal education providers, to provide feedback on the effectiveness of programs
6. Ensure that non-formal education providers understand and meet quality standards.
7. Serve as a model for other school districts in the state.