



## Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

# the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit [www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds](http://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds).

### About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at [www.expandinglearning.org](http://www.expandinglearning.org).

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## Connecting Older Youth to Success Through Afterschool

Many people assume that since high school youth have outgrown daycare and have ready access to academic programs and extracurricular activities provided by the typical comprehensive high school, they have everything they need to succeed. One only has to look, however, at the high numbers of disconnected youth, as well as the high number of dropouts and the expressed concerns of the business community, to accept that many young people are not prepared to enter the workforce and join in as full participants in our nation's democracy.

### Making the Case

Adolescents are at a time in their lives where they are experiencing a number of key developmental tasks that afterschool and summer learning programs have the opportunity to address. Robert Halpern (2009) describes these tasks, as follows:

- *Older youth begin to seek experiences that involve more complex tasks, and they start to assert control over their lives and communities. They also need to balance their preoccupation with self versus a commitment to others.*
- *Teenagers resist being dependent upon and controlled by another, while they also know they must navigate the adult world and create their role in it.*
- *Young people are forging a sense of identity and finding their voice as individuals who can positively influence others. They want to demonstrate real accomplishment, and they yearn for recognition of their achievements.*

While afterschool programs serving older youth are not new, there is growing recognition that they are critical for helping young people grow into well-rounded, successful adults.

Evaluations of 22 afterschool and summer programs done by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) in 2009 found that older youth who participated in expanded learning opportunities demonstrate positive outcomes across a range of indicators, including improved academic success, career preparation, and social and emotional development (Bowles & Brand, 2009).

For some older youth, the regular school day can be too narrowly focused and not long enough to provide adequate access to the types of developmental activities that they want and need. While afterschool programs serving older youth are not new, there is growing recognition that they are critical for helping young people grow into well-rounded, successful adults. Adolescents need access to structured opportunities that offer greater autonomy and meaning. That said, due to competing demands for teenagers' time (such as hobbies, team sports, work, and social interests), activities provided by afterschool programs must be relevant to their wants and needs (Temescal Associates, 2009).

Research has shown that expanded learning opportunities are highly successful in improving young people's academic performance, college and career preparation, social and emotional development, and health and wellness (Bowles & Brand, 2009). Evaluations of 22 afterschool and summer programs done by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) in 2009 found that older youth who participated in expanded learning opportunities demonstrate positive outcomes across a range of indicators, including improved academic success, career preparation, and social and emotional development (Bowles & Brand, 2009).

### **Promising Practices**

Two large-scale afterschool and summer programs for older youth, one across California and one across Chicago, provide a learning laboratory for the field to identify what strategies and structures are most effective. Additionally, what makes these programs so instructive is that they are supported by different funding streams, are led and coordinated by different types of organizations, and were initiated at different levels—one at the state level primarily using federal funds and one at the local level primarily using local funds. Yet, their examples should be helpful to anyone interested in engaging older youth in afterschool and summer learning.

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#### *California*

In California, over 50% of the state's 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding is dedicated to afterschool programs for high school age youth. These 5-year grants are currently supporting 345 high schools programs that serve nearly 55,000 youth. The following examples illuminate essential characteristics of effective local programs guided and supported by this key state-directed initiative known as the After School Safety and Education Program for Teens (ASSETs).

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### *Engaging, Active, and Meaningful Learning Opportunities*

Successful programs that serve older youth foster active, hands-on learning. For example, Balboa High School Afterschool program in San Francisco offers project-based learning clubs that allow participants to engage in hands-on activities, including woodworking, digital media arts and animation, and computer programming and troubleshooting.

Quality programs for teenagers often help them prepare for their future in the workforce. The Los Angeles After School All-Stars program, for example, exposes older youth participants to different career options in its Career Exploration Opportunities Initiative. Participants meet with local business owners, community leaders, and role models through in-person interviews and field trips to workplaces and business schools. Students have had the opportunity to interview chefs at the Culinary Institute and take a design class at the Sketchers headquarters, where they were able to design their own sneakers.

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### *Community Involvement*

Afterschool programs need to build relationships with organizations within the community in order to offer young people a bridging experience to the real world (Temescal Associates, 2009). For example, the program at McLane High School in Fresno, California, partners with a number of businesses and community organizations, such as GAP, Chic Shoes, Macy's, Mary-Kay, Bloomingdale's, the NFL, and other organizations, in order to provide in-kind donations, workshops, and speaking engagements covering topics such as self-esteem and healthy relationships.

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### *Link to the School Day and Use of School Personnel*

Successful afterschool programs must have a strong partnership with school site leaders. This partnership must be based on a shared vision of how they will support young people (Temescal Associates, 2009). The Blair LEARNS high school afterschool program in Pasadena, California, has had success in a number of areas, including recruitment and retention, improved school day attendance, and student achievement. This could not have been possible without the strong relationship between the program's director and the school principal. The two meet regularly and engage school counseling staff to share student performance data, including grades, test scores, attendance, and behavior/discipline. A large percentage of Blair LEARNS participants take advantage of the credit recovery option, and the school increased its on-time graduation rate by over 28% between 2003 and 2007. Of 155 on-time graduates in 2009, 84 relied on credits recovered in afterschool (Forum for Youth Investment, 2009).

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*Chicago*

After School Matters targets high school teens in underserved neighborhoods who attend schools struggling with high drop out rates and low graduation rates. In 2011, After School Matters offered more than 900 programs across Chicago, engaging more than 15,000 teens. Partners included 60 high schools, more than 100 community-based organizations, the Chicago Park District, the Chicago Public Library, and various departments within the City of Chicago. Financial support for these opportunities is provided by a variety of sources, including government funding from the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois, partner support from the schools and parks, and contributions from corporations, foundations, and individuals.

After School Matters core programs are apprenticeships in which teens develop their career readiness capacities while learning marketable skills from industry professionals. The programs keep teens safe and connected to caring adults. A recent study by Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy found that teens participating in After School Matters showed more positive youth development and less problem behavior and exhibited a stronger sense of connection to their school, as well as a stronger perceived value of school and academics (Hirsch, Hedges, Stawicki, & Mekinda, 2011).

Some of the key strategies that make After School Matters successful include

- *hands-on, project-based activities in five content areas: arts, communications, sports, science, and technology;*
- *instructors with professional backgrounds in their content area;*
- *an annual professional development conference for instructors and ongoing youth-work training on concepts from the Youth Program Quality framework developed by the David P. Weikert Center for Youth Program Quality (<http://www.cypq.org/>);*
- *incentives, such as service learning credit, program awards or stipends, transportation support, end-of-year celebrations, food, field trips, guest speakers, and master classes taught by industry experts;*
- *formalized meetings with school leadership to review program success metrics and reinforce roles;*
- *simple introductory telephone conversations with parents to encourage full teen engagement in programming; and*
- *authentic learning that connects teens to the world outside of their school and neighborhood.*

## **Recommendations for Practitioners Within Schools and Within Communities**

While the origination and funding sources of the afterschool and summer learning programs across California and in Chicago described above are different, the lessons learned are similar and consistent regarding how to make these programs work effectively. Based on those findings, here are some key recommendations:

- *Successful programs develop strong partnerships with community-based organizations and the school administration. This includes hiring staff members who develop strong working relationships with principals and key school personnel. Collaboration with community partners is also essential.*
- *In order to be competitive with older youth's interests and developmental needs, programs must offer a blend of structured activities, informal social time, opportunities to develop skills, and the chance to build close relationships with adults and peers. Older youth are also motivated to join programs that provide academic credit, college and job preparation, internship opportunities, and stipends for participation.*
- *Gathering youth input on program planning and offerings is crucial to engaging and retaining older youth.*
- *Successful programs should have strong adult leaders and skilled staff who are able to relate to older youth and are more expert in their subject matter than those who work with younger children.*

### **Capture Their Hearts and Their Minds Will Follow**

Thanks to a partnership with NASA, students in the rural community of Santa Rosa, Texas, have created a community on Mars that was not only scientifically sound but also one they'd want to be a part of. Focused back on Earth, students toured the city's courthouse and met with a federal magistrate, whose personal story gave the teenagers a better understanding of how current coursework relates to future careers.

The "ACE" (Afterschool Centers on Education) program serves 300 students ages 12 to 18. It has a holistic approach that focuses on strengthening science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and arts skills. By blending in the arts, abstract thinking is increased and lets students explore creative ideas while also learning math and science. Thanks to extensive community partnerships, students are introduced to a range of careers through field trips and interactions with local leaders.

According to a survey of district teachers, 80% reported an increased rate of homework completion and 84% reported an overall improvement in academic performance for participating students. In the past year, 100% of seniors in the program graduated. By creating engaging and meaningful learning opportunities in partnership with the community the ACE program is truly living its motto "Capture their hearts and their minds will follow."

## For More Information

There are a number of resources that provide best-practices recommendations for afterschool practitioners:

- **High School Field Resources** (<http://www.temescalassociates.com/resources/hsresourcesfield.asp>), developed by Temescal Associates, provides articles, written interviews, case studies, and other resources for high school workers.
- **Learning in Afterschool & Summer** (<http://www.learninginafterschool.org/>), developed by Temescal Associates, calls on afterschool to promote young people's learning by incorporating five key learning principles. It provides a number of resources for high school afterschool program leaders, including videos, research, literature, current developments in the afterschool field, a regularly updated blog, and much more.
- **Beyond Expectations: The Power of High School Afterschool** is a video that provides a number of best practices and recommendations for high school afterschool programs. It is available to watch or order at <http://www.temescalassociates.com/video/beyondexpectationsweb/beyondexpectationswatch.htm>.
- **After School Matters** (<http://www.afterschoolmatters.org/>) offers more detailed background on After School Matters, its programming, and related research.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Sam Piha** is the founder and principal of Temescal Associates, a firm that provides consulting in education, youth development, and afterschool programs. He began his career in 1975 as a classroom teacher and a family therapist before directing afterschool programs at the regional and national levels. He has been a long-time advocate for and trainer on high school afterschool programs.

**David Sinski** is chief officer of strategy and innovation for After School Matters in Chicago. He has worked in youth development for over 25 years, starting first as a counselor to teenage runaways and their families and then working with immigrant families as they struggled to support teens at risk of psychiatric hospitalization. More recently he has held administrative positions and has currently served in leadership capacities at After School Matters. He has been active in building coalitions of providers and intermediaries and has great interest in nurturing learning communities regarding serving older youth.

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