



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.

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.

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The Afterschool and Community School Connection: Expanding Learning Opportunities and Partnerships

When community and school leaders in Tulsa, Oklahoma, faced the challenge of providing meaningful instruction, youth development, and recreational opportunities for students during the summer, they turned to their existing community school partners for help. Over 40 partners provided summer learning experiences for about 400 children, just as they do during the regular school year, both after school and during the school day. Without a culture of partnerships, children would not have these rich opportunities available for learning and development.

Tulsa is one example of an increasing number of communities across around the country that are using the community school strategy and its reliance on partnerships to provide expanded learning opportunities—before, after, and during traditional school hours, as well as on weekends and during summers.

Just as community schools typically orchestrate local partnerships in order to provide afterschool programs, comprehensive afterschool programs that have strong community partners—such as those funded with 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative monies—can more easily be broadened and deepened to become community schools. For example, the Lincoln Community Learning Centers Initiative was built with 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds, and Chicago has used these funds in a similar way in many schools. The funding stream provided by this key federal initiative has, in fact, been a vital resource for the afterschool component of community schools across the nation.

In many ways, a community school is like a smartphone. With a smartphone, you can select any “app” and receive the services you need. At a community school—as a “smartschool”—key stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, community members, and partners, all work together to determine what “apps,” or what opportunities and supports, students, family members, and residents need.

Partnerships are essential in the current economic climate. Funding from states, cities, and districts for summer and afterschool opportunities has been drastically reduced, and fewer students are receiving afterschool academic reinforcement and enrichment, as well as summer supports that are essential in improving student outcomes (Fleming, 2011; Benning & Athavaley, 2009). With budgets under continued threat and challenging economic prospects, schools must build deep and intentional relationships with community partners to expand learning opportunities. In addition, these circumstances make it even more important to maintain strong support for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative and to encourage greater use of federal Title I monies for community schools and for expanded learning opportunities after school and during the summers.

The Community School Strategy

What are community schools, and how do they work?

A community school is a place and a set of partnerships connecting school, family, and community. Community schools reach families and community residents by extending learning after school, over weekends, and during the summertime and by making the school open to the entire neighborhood.

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What sort of opportunities do community schools typically offer? The answer varies based on local need and resources, though most typically offer a combination of the following:

- *Early childhood opportunities*
- *Engaged learning in the classroom*
- *Expanded learning opportunities, including afterschool and summers*
- *Family engagement*

- *Health and social supports*
- *Youth development*
- *College and career assistance*
- *Community engagement*

Like a smartphone, community schools also have an operating system that makes all the “apps” work in a synchronized manner. A school-site leadership team, often comprised of a supportive principal, teachers, students, parents, support staff, community partners, and others, is responsible for creating a shared vision, identifying desired results, and helping to align and integrate the work of partners with the school. Additionally, a community school coordinator—ideally full time—is an essential ingredient of successful efforts. The coordinator works hand-in-hand with the principal, and is responsible for building relationships with school staff and community partners, engaging the community, and coordinating an efficient delivery of supports to students, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Community schools function and are sustained most effectively when they are part of a system of community schools that spans grade levels, school buildings, and school districts and are embedded in the culture of the school district and the community. These scaled-up systems typically have a community leadership group, as well as an intermediary organizational partner that connects school-site work to communitywide decision making. Community-level strategies can have significant benefits for scaled-up expanded learning efforts.

In Tulsa (www.tacsi.org), where there are 22 community schools and a community leadership group that includes two superintendents and community leaders, it was natural for leaders who wanted to create enriching summer opportunities to reach out to community partners. They asked partners such as the American Red Cross, Boy Scouts, the Tulsa City-County Library, the Tulsa Health Department, and others, who were already organized at the community level and were already working in community schools, to step up and fill in the summer gap—and they did. Community school coordinators, primarily funded through Title I, are essential to getting partners organized to support students.

In Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon, multiple community partnerships align expanded learning opportunities for afterschool, weekends, and summers with the core mission of the school system to support student learning. There are 68 Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) community schools (<http://web.multco.us/sun/sun-community-schools>) in the county. At the systems level, the SUN Coordinating Council brings together representatives from each of six participating school districts, the county, the Portland mayor’s office, and business and community partners to drive the SUN initiative. The lead partner at each SUN school signs a collaboration agreement that establishes the results and strategies they will use to achieve results. The agreement, which is reviewed annually, states that “All SUN CS (community schools) services are to

be linked with the school day and are planned and delivered in close collaboration with the school principal and staff.” A recent study found that students in SUN schools have higher attendance and earned more credits towards graduation than their matched peers.

The community school strategy supports rural communities in identifying expanded learning opportunities, as well. The Bangor Area School District in rural Pennsylvania has 3,347 students, 35% of whom were eligible for free and reduced lunch in 2010—an increase of 12 percentage points over 4 years. Bangor’s schools are part of the United

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Way of Greater Lehigh Valley’s Community Partners for Student Success (COMPASS), a regional community school initiative. The initiative leverages 21st Century Community Learning Center dollars, as well as community-based assets. Bangor’s community schools partner with local banks, community colleges, faith-based institutions, local government, and others, to support expanded learning activities. According to Jill Pereira, the director of COMPASS, “The community school strategy has helped Bangor engage local partners such as the business community differently. They are more than funding partners as they support apprenticeships, weekend and summer learning experiences, service projects, and more.”

The importance of parent engagement to a child’s academic success is widely acknowledged, and community schools offer multiple pathways to engage parents. In a community school, parents often participate in adult-focused activities in the school building, such as ESL or GED classes, family literacy programs, and computer training. These activities are often provided in conjunction with afterschool, evening, and weekend programs and in collaboration with community partners. Community schools also involve parents through family nights; intensive parent outreach, including home visits; and parent leadership programs.

Parents also are decision makers who are part of the process of identifying programs and activities for students. In Cincinnati (<http://clcinstitute.org/>), parents at Ethel M. Taylor Academy participate in the school’s Local School Decision Making Committee (LSDMC), which makes decisions about which partners to bring into the school to support student learning. For example, the LSDMC assessed afterschool providers and made the decision to offer tennis lessons. This choice strengthened the neighborhood by bringing activity to an under-utilized community tennis court while also teaching students about math principles in an engaging manner.

Many other places use a partnership strategy to expand learning opportunities in their community schools as well. In New York City, the Children’s Aid Society (<http://nationalcenterforcommunityschools.childrensaidsociety.org>) serves as the lead partner

agency for 22 community schools. Funded in part by 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Title I funds, they provide enriching afterschool activities such as dance, music, cooking classes, leadership development, and college readiness activities to support student learning.

Partnerships support college and career goals as well. In Philadelphia, the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania (<http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/index.php>) provides enriching and engaging opportunities to students at nearby Sayre High School. Teachers extol the benefits of having a partner with expertise and resources to support classroom instruction through activities such as hands-on labs and small group projects led by Penn students. Participating students are developing college and career readiness skills in the health field through expanded learning opportunities that include clinical practice, outreach to the community, community health development projects, health careers education, and professional skills development.

Beyond their direct impact on students and their families, community schools offer another crucial advantage to school and community leaders: community schools generate public support for public education. Community schools and comprehensive afterschool programs with community partners are often strongly connected.

By mobilizing the assets and expertise of community partners to offer enriched and expanded learning opportunities for students after school and over weekends and summers and to address nonschool factors influencing achievement, community schools give everyone a role and a responsibility in the education of our young people. From a community-schools perspective, a range of stakeholders across various sectors of the community—business, higher education, nonprofit, government, faith-based and neighborhood groups—must contribute to the education of our children. Our nation will only achieve its education goals by engaging the entire community in deep and purposeful partnerships with the host of organizations in our communities that have a stake in the success of our young people.

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Recommendations

A community's decision to expand learning opportunities and partnerships after school and during the summer can be a catalyst for developing a community school. Conversely, community schools are a natural venue to expand learning and partnerships for students and families beyond the typical school day and year. Both necessitate adopting effective strategies for engaging in an open and positive dialogue with school and community entities, mobilizing all the assets in a community, aligning efforts with the school's improvement plan, and affirming a commitment to enriching and engaging opportunities that motivate students to learn and expand their experiences so that they can be successful.

We offer the following recommendations for schools, school districts, and partners in order to strengthen learning opportunities after school and over the summer using community school partnerships.

- **Maximize the funding, partnership, and family engagement elements of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative to develop and deliver comprehensive afterschool and summer learning programs.** *If appropriate, sustain these efforts by building them “up and out” to be community schools.*
- **Encourage greater use of the federal Title I monies, including supplemental educational services (SES) monies, both for expanding learning opportunities after school and during summers and for initiating and sustaining community schools.**
- **Apply the community school strategy to enhance and sustain expanding learning opportunity efforts.** *Successful community schools around the country have incorporated afterschool and summer learning and expanded learning partners as a central part of their work.*
- **Incentivize partnerships that support expanding learning afterschool and over summers.** *More places are seeing that expanded learning opportunities are most effective when supported and sustained by multiple partnerships. Funders should require or incentivize community school partnerships as part of their application process.*
- **Leverage funding through the community school strategy.** *Community schools are able to leverage funding from partners; city, state, and federal government; philanthropies; and other sources. By diversifying their funding, community schools ensure continued support of expanded learning opportunities and other activities.*

For More Information

Learn More

Visit a community school. The best way to see the myriad of activity taking place before, during, and after the school day is to visit one of the many community schools around the country.

Read More

Community-Based Learning: Engaging Students for Success and Citizenship (http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CBL_Book_1_27_06.pdf)

www.communityschools.org

Expanding the learning day: An essential component of the community schools strategy in *New Directions for Youth Development*, Fall 2011.

Scaling Up School and Community Partnerships: The Community Schools Strategy (www.communityschools.org/scalingup) guides schools, districts, and partners through the stages of starting and scaling up a community school strategy.

Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success (http://www.communityschools.org/resources/capacity_building_finance.aspx)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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