



# 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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## Tennis in Afterschool and Summer Programs: A Winning New Model to Expand Fitness and Learning

The expanded learning community is uniquely positioned to provide opportunities for children and youth to be physically active in safe, accessible spaces.

The introduction of quality physical activity and sports programming in afterschool and summer programs is a critical strategy in the fight to reverse the crisis of childhood obesity in this country (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2011). The crisis has garnered growing attention in recent years. Nearly one-third of American children and adolescents, age 2–19, are either overweight or obese; moreover, since 1980, the rates of childhood obesity have tripled (CDC, 2012). In fact, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (n.d.) warns that if this trend is not reversed “we are in danger of raising the first generation of American children who may live sicker and die younger than the generation that preceded them.”

The primary causes of childhood obesity are well understood (Levi, Segal, St. Larent, & Kohn, 2011). In simplest terms, children and youth consume more calories than they burn off through physical activity or growth. The expanded learning community (which includes schools,

nonprofits, state networks, local funders, and local intermediaries) is uniquely positioned to provide opportunities for children and youth to be physically active in safe, accessible spaces, while acquiring the knowledge and skills to live active and healthy lives at healthy weights.

In addition to its key role in reversing childhood obesity, a CDC study (2010) found that quality and consistent physical activity—at least 60 minutes a day—has many other health benefits and is positively associated with improved academic performance, increased concentration and attention in class, and improved classroom behavior. The study recommended that education leaders incorporate sports programming and physical activity into afterschool programming as a way of supporting the academic mission of schools (CDC, 2010).

This article describes how changes in the game of tennis and the vision and energy of local nonprofits, schools systems, and state-level leaders can democratize the opportunity to be physically active during out-of-school time and can have a positive effect on expanding learning after school and during the summer. Other types of physical activities might also offer such opportunities if we think creatively about imbuing expanding learning time programs with physical activities aimed at educating the whole child and reinforcing learning in creative, active ways.

## **Tennis as Intervention**

Over the last few years, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) has worked with grassroots leaders, tennis providers, afterschool programs, schools, school districts, and private and commercial clubs that serve substantial youth populations to pilot and then fully implement the most substantial change to the game of tennis in a generation. In January 2012, the USTA changed the rules of tennis to scale the sport appropriately for children and launched an initiative, 10 and Under Tennis, to encourage them to take up the sport. Now, children between the ages of 6 and 10 years old play on courts sized appropriately for them. They use tennis balls that are larger, move slower through the air, and bounce at an ideal height. Children now also use newly designed racquets that are a more appropriate size and weight for their age. What these changes have meant for the afterschool world is that now tennis can be played in almost any recreational setting without the need for traditional courts, and it can be introduced by caring adults who have no formal tennis background.

The examples that follow illustrate how afterschool and summer programs have integrated tennis programming with a resulting positive impact on both participants and providers.

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### *Georgia*

In the spring of 2009, the Georgia Afterschool Investment Council (GAIC), the state afterschool network lead in Georgia, partnered with the USTA and a select number of Georgia-based National Junior Tennis and Learning Chapters to launch the Georgia Afterschool Tennis and Education program. The Georgia Afterschool Tennis and Education program, or GATE, is a tennis, fitness, and learning program that primarily serves economically disadvantaged youth living in Atlanta, Savannah, and Augusta. The GATE program, created to increase physical activity and fitness in Georgia's youth, exposes youth to new mentor relationships and enhances existing afterschool programs that serve young people in the hours after the school day ends and during the summer months. The GATE program strives to accomplish this by providing a tennis component, usually offered two to three times a week, to afterschool and summer learning programs that serve children in targeted neighborhoods.

After being launched in 2010, the GATE program grew in 2011 by 15%, serving 36 sites and over 1,400 young people, ages 6–12. These sites included elementary schools, middle schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA's, city and county recreation facilities, a public housing unit, several 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and Department of Health and Human Services Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grantees. The GATE program sites provide a minimum of 6–8 weeks of programming in the fall and spring, during which participants are likely to be exposed to tennis 2–3 hours a week.

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*New Jersey*

The National Junior Tennis & Learning of Trenton (NJTLT) is a nonprofit, community-based organization dedicated to improving the lives of young people from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds through tennis and education programming. It serves annually 2,500 young people annually. NJTLT created the Academic Creative Engagement curriculum in response to requests from its school partners. NJTLT was aided in this venture by financial support from local sponsors, as well as funding from the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative as a New Jersey

sub-grantee. The Academic Creative Engagement curriculum is a free afterschool educational and fitness program that supports classroom instruction by using an academic curriculum connected to the sport of tennis, 21st century skills, and the new Common Core State Standards. The curriculum provides key developmental assets to participating children, gives them access to safe and healthy educational opportunities, and encourages parents to participate in their child's learning.

The Academic Creative Engagement curriculum is a free afterschool educational and fitness program that supports classroom instruction by using an academic curriculum connected to the sport of tennis, 21st century skills, and the new Common Core State Standards.

NJTLT typically implements the Academic Creative Engagement curriculum in an afterschool setting by having approximately 30 students per session participate 2–3 days a week for a 6–8 week session. NJTLT offers three such sessions for youth throughout the school year (fall, winter, and spring) and then offers a summer session that uses a more intensive programming model. On each Academic Creative Engagement program day, the students are divided into two groups. For the first 45 minutes, one group of students learns about tennis and exercise with a tennis professional while the other group participates in academic enrichment activities focusing on math, literacy, and nutrition. After 45 minutes, the groups rotate their focus for the remaining 45 minutes.

Online assessment surveys are used to measure program outcomes. In addition, report card grades and student reflections are included in the evaluation process.

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## Virginia

For the last 2 years, the USTA has partnered with Newport News Public Schools and the Newport News 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs to bring the 10 and Under Tennis program to local schools and the broader community. With the enthusiastic support of the USTA and its Virginia state affiliate, USTA Virginia, over 300 of the school district's third graders who participate in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs have been given the opportunity to engage in tennis programming through 10 and Under Tennis. The school system has connected math and reading activities to its tennis programming to give participants a complete experience, exercising both the body and the mind. The system also plans to link the tennis program to students' school-based physical fitness program as a way of fostering greater health and wellness.

After students have completed the 10 and Under program, they are encouraged to participate in the tennis programs sponsored by Newport News Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, as well as those sponsored by other local clubs and wellness centers. City leaders hope that the tennis component of its 21st Century Community Learning Centers programming will result in having young people not only develop an attachment to and proficiency in the sport of tennis but also in having them develop the confidence, character, and resilience to succeed in and graduate from high school.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to guide key local stakeholder groups in planning and implementing a successful sports or physical activity program (whether tennis or another activity) as part of high quality afterschool and summer programming:

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### *Afterschool and Summer Learning Providers*

- *The successful integration of physical activity into an afterschool program requires that a provider be fully committed to facilitating this type of program enhancement, requiring resources in terms of time, space, and talent.*
- *Afterschool providers should develop partnerships with individuals and organizations that have deep expertise in the sport to make the overall effort successful.*
- *The afterschool or summer learning leader should design the physical activity or sports activity not only to expand fitness time and opportunities, but also to reinforce other learning goals of the program, including developing and enhancing skills that are important to students' success during the school day (for example, reinforcing the importance of academic success, responsibility, teamwork, and persistence).*
- *Providers must make any physical activity component of their programs engaging and interesting for the young people involved. They should choose activities that will enable youth participants to experience early success and competence.*

- *Afterschool state networks and intermediaries should assist in quality programming and expansion by*
  - making sure there is adequate program dosage and intensity provided for participants;
  - having a streamlined monitoring and evaluation process;
  - involving city-level elected officials; and
  - assigning dedicated staff for administration of program effort; and helping secure national, regional, and local funding sources.

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*Sports Organizations or Physical Activity Groups*

- *Groups should understand their core competencies and have those be the focus of any collaboration. They should not stray from what they know and do well.*
- *Groups should look for partnerships that allow them to add value without straying from their mission. Yet, it is very important to reinforce the particular learning goals of the afterschool or summer partner programs, as well as other goals including responsibility, attendance, and teamwork.*
- *Groups should be ready to commit to a multiyear relationship (3 years or more) so that they are able to demonstrate the efficacy of their program or sport.*
- *In addition to supporting and enhancing the services of an afterschool provider, groups should also work to increase the capacity of those providers so that they can successfully implement the sports or physical activity program independently over time.*

**Conclusion**

The health and the quality of life that our children will enjoy are threatened by cultural trends that inhibit the development of healthy habits. Schools undervalue and greatly limit physical education and physical activity during the school day. Too many communities in this country have limited access to healthy and nutritious foods. Finally, too many young people spend too many hours in front of electronic screens instead of engaging in active play.

Communities throughout the country can begin to reverse the effects of these trends by harnessing the energy and resources of local and state networks of afterschool and summer learning providers and making more intentional use of those hours that young people are not in school. In addition to keeping young people active, partnerships between out-of-school-time providers and tennis and other fitness organizations—can also broaden young peoples’ skill sets and opportunities—a winning combination. We do not have to settle for a future in which our children live shorter and sicker lives than we have lived.

## For More Information

[www.usta.com/Youth-Tennis/National-Junior-Tennis-Learning/NJTL](http://www.usta.com/Youth-Tennis/National-Junior-Tennis-Learning/NJTL)

[www.usta.com/About-USTA/thebigserve/afterschool-adoptaschool](http://www.usta.com/About-USTA/thebigserve/afterschool-adoptaschool)

[www.usta.com/About-USTA/thebigserve/resources](http://www.usta.com/About-USTA/thebigserve/resources)

[www.afterschoolga.org](http://www.afterschoolga.org)

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Barry Ford** is the director of public affairs and advocacy for the United States Tennis Association and has been a member of the USTA national staff since 2006. He leads the association's efforts to build and deepen its relationships with public sector policy makers at every level of government and to expand the availability of quality, tennis-themed, out-of-school- time programs throughout the country. Ford is a board member of the Afterschool Alliance and served as vice president for external relations at the After-School Corporation (TASC). He brings 26 years of professional experience as a government official, lawyer, nonprofit executive, and political candidate to this work. Ford holds an AB degree from Harvard College and a JD from Harvard Law School.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Data and statistics: Obesity rates among all children in the United States. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>

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