



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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Family Involvement as a Critical Element of Quality Expanded Learning Opportunities

Take the time to bond with families. To some we are like a second parent, and we are seen as a partner as we watch their children grow. The parents want you to feel what they feel and what they've been through and take the time with them.

- Chicago Afterschool Provider

The relationship between providers, parents, and youth should be circular—communication should flow openly.

- Chicago Afterschool Parent

They (staff) do keep me involved, but you know what? I put myself out there...you (staff) need anything, call me up.

- Washington DC Afterschool Parent

Quality expanded learning opportunities after school and during summers not only build youth's academic and social skills, they provide the opportunity for them to contribute to their communities' development. Particularly for Latino students, who are often some of the most vulnerable and underserved in the educational system, these programs can be their connection to a variety of sources of support in their academic and developmental growth. The core of successful programs is a close connection to their families and communities.

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These fundamental lessons have emerged over the last 5 years, as the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has strengthened its efforts to build the capacity of its network of affiliated schools and community-based organizations to provide quality expanded learning opportunities programs for Latino students. During this period, it has become increasingly clear that certain strategies and practices make the most positive difference.

The following best practices, based on a review of the literature and the experiences of NCLR practitioners in the field, can and should be applied across expanded learning programs working with vulnerable populations:

- **Communication and trust between parents and program staff should be consistent.** *Maintaining regular communication and accurately conveying program goals to parents and families can be challenging; however, providers should make it a priority to understand the values and needs of the families served. An NCLR provider in the Rio Grande Valley uses home visits, for example, as an effective way to develop and maintain relationships with families and to learn first-hand what is important to them and their children's education and development.*
- **Wrap-around services accessed through a school or a community-based organization can offer invaluable opportunities for engagement for any program.** *Approximately 70% of NCLR affiliates offer wrap-around services, including counseling, snacks and meals, fitness and nutrition education programs, and classes for parents. Parents in these programs especially appreciate the opportunity to support their child's learning by participating in many of these activities. The higher a family's engagement with an organization, the more trust that is built and the higher the possibility for their sustained participation in programs.*
- **Programs should operate as a bridge between parents and schools.** *Parents who lack information about the education system, or whose level of engagement is otherwise limited during regular school hours, often rely on afterschool and summer learning programs to learn about their child's progress. Afterschool and summer programs can provide parents the tools and resources to become active advocates for their child's education. One NCLR affiliate in Los Angeles ensures parents have a voice in the program by circulating a survey that asks parents to list the core values they want their kids to be taught during the life skills portion of the afterschool program. The selected values are then featured in weekly programming. Another NCLR affiliate program involves parents through a Consejo de Padres (parent council) that helps reach out to other parents to get them involved as volunteers and in planning special events.*
- **Programming can be enhanced through community partners.** *Expanded learning programs represent a critical opportunity for youth, particularly underserved youth, to gain competitive skills, such as global literacy and problem solving, and to develop their creativity and capacity to innovate through additional academic supports and enrichment activities. Community partners can*

enhance the effectiveness and reach of an afterschool program's activities. An NCLR-affiliate school in Houston seamlessly integrates community art and music resources by working with a local nonprofit organization that offers a mariachi afterschool club, providing not only music instruction but access to musical instruments. Close collaboration with families and community groups makes it more likely that the participating students will receive the full range of learning opportunities they need to be successful, and they'll get them in a positive, engaging environment.

- **Active family involvement can help parents understand a program's value and provide critical support for their child's attendance and engagement.**

Some afterschool and summer programs have poor attendance because the programming may not be engaging or interesting to youth. Programs may also be poorly subscribed because parents have little knowledge or involvement in these programs, so they do not understand the value of the programs and do not encourage or expect their children to attend. The Big Thought afterschool and summer programs in Dallas, for example, have high attendance rates, especially among hard-to-reach, low-income Latino students. Program leaders assertively reach out to families through a variety of community- and faith-based organizations to encourage their children to participate and attend regularly. The powerful combination of Big Thought's highly engaging programming, which integrates the arts through all subjects, and its extensive family and community outreach efforts has resulted in a nearly 90% attendance rate for its programs.

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In a time of severe constraints on public financing and deep budget cutbacks, it is very important to examine the key elements that maximize program impact for students and their families. Families and community partners are invaluable in ensuring that the components of effective programming for students are in place in afterschool and summer programs. They help elevate the program's value and raise awareness about the necessary resources to implement it effectively. Everybody wins!

Wausau, Wisconsin

In Wausau, Wisconsin, the school district's summer program was poorly attended by youth from some student subgroups, including struggling, low-income white students, as well as Hmong and Latino students, who needed additional learning support the most. The summer learning coordinator and principals of the participating schools turned this situation around by communicating directly with the families and by working through community intermediaries to explain both the specific types of assistance that students would receive to help them catch up and keep up and also the wide selection of fun, broadening experiences that students could choose.

For More Information

Additional resources for effectively engaging families in afterschool and summer programs can be found at the following websites:

- The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has published *Core Qualities for Successful Expanded Learning Time Programs*, which builds on existing research and assessment tools to address the unique needs of community organizations and schools serving Latino students and their families. http://www.nclr.org/index.php/issues_and_programs/education/programs/extended_learning_time_programs/
- With a grant from the New York Times Foundation, TASC has developed a guidebook for parent engagement, *Increasing Family and Parent Engagement in After-School*, which outlines 15 examples of how site coordinators and staff are successfully engaging parents at their after-school program. It also contains sample materials that program sites can use to improve parent involvement. <http://www.tascorp.org/content/document/detail/1455/>
- Child Trends has published a research-to-results brief, *Building, Engaging, and Supporting Family and Parental Involvement in Out-of-School Time Programs*, that discusses elements of family involvement and why it matters for out-of-school-time programs. The brief also examines some of the issues that programs face when attempting to engage parents, and it offers suggestions for how programs and staff can encourage family and parental involvement. http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_06_19_RB_ParentEngage.pdf

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Delia Pompa is senior vice president for programs at the National Council of La Raza. Throughout her career, Pompa has focused on creating new responses to the needs of Hispanic families and children within leading local, state, and federal agencies and national and international organizations. As an educator, Pompa has been especially instrumental in helping academic institutions understand and respond to the needs of underserved children and their teachers. She is the former director of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs in the U.S. Department of Education and the former executive director of the National Association for Bilingual Education.

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