



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This collection of articles is excerpted 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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Introduction: The Importance of and New Opportunities for Leveraging Afterschool and Summer Learning and School-Community Partnerships for Student Success

It is a given that today's level of student learning will directly impact our future economic and civic well-being. Yet too often, educators and our public schools, serving almost 50 million students, seem to be under attack, underappreciated, and often underfunded. This is not the way to prepare our nation—and our nation's children—for the future. We need to find a set of strategies and tools both to support them and to accelerate learning.

Among the most promising of such strategies is expanding learning and opportunities for our nation's youth to leverage the power of quality afterschool and summer learning programs and the richly varied and diverse community partnerships that can accompany these programs. While the education improvement toolbox needs to include a number of other important strategies, the sole focus of this compendium, *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*, is on how a growing number of communities across America are successfully and more effectively using some of the available hours children and youth are not formally in school, which equals almost 80% of their time.

Over the past 15 years, there has been a dramatic expansion in the range of engaging learning opportunities available to children and youth through high quality afterschool and summer learning programs. Despite the challenges of the recent economic downturn, this rich array of expanded opportunities for learning is helping millions of America's children and youth have access to experiences and supports that help them succeed. Yet many more such opportunities are needed and wanted across neighborhoods and schools nationwide, while many are still feeling the continuing budget cutbacks from the Great Recession.

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These approaches have evolved into intentional strategies for providing comprehensive educational and developmental learning opportunities. Many quality school-based and community-based afterschool and summer programs have thus now moved from the margins to being a significant part of the education and learning enterprise. These programs have emerged as an opportune and cutting-edge educational approach for rethinking how resources such as time, place, human capital, and financial and material resources can be allocated to support the personalized learning and development of each child, regardless of his/her circumstances.

Yet, with the tight budgets currently confronting families, public agencies, nonprofits, and even foundations, it is worth stepping back to explore whether expanded learning opportunities are making a significant difference in learning and student success. We also need to assess whether there is an adequate infrastructure, not only to make existing opportunities more effective and efficient, but also to support their sustainability or expansion—and ultimately to enable state and local leaders to take these sometimes new and different learning opportunities to scale in communities where they are needed and wanted.

This compendium presents an impressive and significant body of work that comprises almost 70 reports, research studies, essays, articles, and commentaries by more than 100 authors representing a range of researchers, educators, policy makers, and professionals in the field, as well as thought leaders and opinion influencers. Collectively, these writings present bold, persuasive evidence that by providing engaging, high quality afterschool and summer learning programs that rely on robust school-community partnerships, expanding learning can generate positive and significant effects on important outcomes related to learning and community/family engagement.

In other words, we can boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Moreover, the nation's largest investment in such opportunities, the annual \$1.2 billion 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, has also been a resounding success, and has been essential to the movement nationwide. Its addition to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 was made possible with bipartisan

support in Congress. During the second term of the Clinton Administration, the program began to have real and substantial impact as both the President and First Lady courageously pushed for rapidly increasing investments. During this period, funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers grew from \$1 million to \$1 billion, enabling its scale-up across America. In the years since, Republican and Democratic Congressional leaders alike have continued to approve the program's funding level.

Throughout this compendium, case studies and best practice reports show how the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is an important and often critical funding source to local and state afterschool and summer learning programs, as well as to broader educational support initiatives such as community schools and community education. The research findings, best practices, and policy implications presented in this compendium span a wide array of topics and issues germane to learning, development, and educational success. Very importantly, they also lay a solid foundation for considering what must be done further both to improve the quality and grow the quantity of enriching and engaging opportunities that can support school and lifetime success of many more young people.

Well-designed, quality programs offered to students beyond the school day and year are prime vehicles for providing experiential, hands-on learning opportunities that are often difficult to offer within the constraints of the traditional school day and year.

In the hours after school, on weekends, and during summers, innovative school teachers and community educators are creating enriching activities to expand the minds and open the horizons of young people from all backgrounds—challenging them to dare to try something that stretches them to reach their full potential. Some of these innovative partnerships are supporting students who are struggling to learn core content, helping young people recover credits critically needed for graduation, and breaking new ground by providing innovative ways for middle and high school students to accumulate new credits that will help them on a path to career and college readiness.

Turning “nonschool hours” into “learning hours” requires us to provide learning opportunities that address a broader spectrum of interests and talents possessed by today's youth. We need educators, community organizations, employers, and volunteers not simply to work better together but also to work in new and more productive ways that spark student interest in learning. Afterschool and summer programs throughout the country are, for example, helping schools better fulfill their responsibility to teach students in the most engaging fashion. They are also providing a logical means to bring new community resources to the learning enterprise and to position schools as a hub of learning beyond the typical school day and year. In addition, they are empowering educators and families as facilitators or “orchestrators” of learning—not only in and around the school but also in the broader community.

Visiting high quality expanded learning programs like those presented in this compendium is indeed inspiring. You will see young people meaningfully engaged with each other, as well as with educators, youth development professionals, employers, college students and professors, and volunteers from the community. You will see them participating in activities that encourage inquiry, responsibility, problem solving, solid work habits, creativity, mastery, and a sense of belonging.

The task before us is to work together to invest the will and resources needed to sustain and expand engaging and enriching learning opportunities—anytime and everywhere—so that, regardless of the time or location, young people have access to the supports and opportunities they need to advance their knowledge and skills. Such a collective commitment and effort will place and help keep students on a path to high school graduation as the first rung to achieving economic success and leading successful, fulfilling lives. At the local, state, and national levels, we must continue to build out a solid and sustainable infrastructure and expand strategic partnerships—including the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative—to promote high quality, cost-effective, and affordable programs. Included as key elements in this infrastructure are technical assistance, professional development, visionary leadership and stable governance, and strategies and policies that maximize fiscal and human capital.

In a high quality expanded learning experience, you can see youth engaged in a wide variety of activities:

- Writing and acting in the performing arts with local community theatre members
- Learning real-life communication skills by taking a stand on a debate team
- Mastering the strategy of chess
- Exploring engineering in a robotics club
- Reading, writing, and illustrating books with a local artist or photographer
- Testing water quality to improve local natural resources with an environmentalist volunteer
- Measuring and using math to design buildings and bridges with local engineers, architects, and employers
- Creating digital games with a graphic designer or composing music with a musician either online or in person
- Apprenticing with a master craftsman
- Teaching younger students in libraries
- Serving as a docent in local museums
- Gardening in the school or community garden and learning to cook their produce
- Getting more fit, eating healthy snacks, and learning about lifetime sports
- Earning high school credit for graduation or preparing for college through partnerships with schools, colleges, employers, or local libraries and museums

This growing infrastructure also includes, and in fact relies on, new strategies for pooling and leveraging resources designed to make a larger impact. For example, the almost 11,000 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs across America involve annually more than 30,000 community partners along with nearly 300,000 families. These partnerships generate significant additional resources to support expanded learning experiences and opportunities for the children and youth served by these programs. So underfunding, diverting funding, or cutting funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program will result not only in diminishing the number of children and youth who can be served but also in the collateral losses of other funding and other resources, including the countless extra “hands and hearts” that greatly exceed any actual budget cut.

Therefore, maximizing the full potential of expanded learning opportunities and partnerships requires a courageous step.

We must venture beyond the notion that learning happens only during the traditional school day and year, when young people are wearing their “student” hats.

Working together, educators, families, community organizations, employers, and volunteers can expand opportunities for continuous and sustained learning in positive, safe, and structured environments.

The basic architecture already exists in many places around the country; thus, our challenge is to figure out how to hardwire this opportunity infrastructure into schools, local and state education agencies, and communities so students and families who need and want quality expanded learning opportunities during the afterschool and summer hours have adequate and appropriate access to them. The articles and authors in *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* offer concrete strategies, approaches, evidence, and best practices to accomplish just that, and even more. I invite you to join us in expanding minds and opportunities by leveraging the power of quality afterschool and summer learning for student success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry K. Peterson has a strong background at the local, state, and national levels in education reform, serving as the counselor to the U.S. Secretary of Education, architect of one of America’s most comprehensive state improvement efforts, and an expert witness to a dozen states. He currently is a senior fellow at the College of Charleston; serves on 10 education boards (e.g., Alliance for Excellent Education, News Literacy Project, and the Charleston area Engaging Creative Minds), and chairs the national board of the Afterschool Alliance. Peterson has a BS in chemistry and education from the University of Wisconsin and a PhD from the University of South Carolina, with an emphasis in educational research. He was the 2010 Lifetime Education Achievement Awardee from the president and CEO of the C.S. Mott Foundation.