

Providence After School Alliance

Providence, RI



Leveraging community resources and partnerships to offer young people exciting and engaging activities afterschool and in the summer.



A Snapshot from a Participant's Perspective

It's a warm summer morning and at 8:30 am, Providence seventh grader, Theodora Logan arrives at Gilbert Stuart Middle School via school bus. Theodora is one of nearly 200 participants in the Providence After School Alliance's (PASA) AfterZone Summer Scholars camp—a hands-on summer program designed to build STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and literacy skills for students who are testing just below proficiency in math and literacy.



From 8:30 to 8:45 am, Theodora starts her day by eating a healthy breakfast with her friends that includes cereal and fruit before boarding another bus that will take her and the rest of her cohort to their field research site. She is participating in the Urban Naturalists—a hands-on environmental science program designed by and run in partnership with the Audubon Society of Rhode Island.



At 9:00 am, Theodora and the Urban Naturalists arrive at their field research site—Neutaconkanut Park—which is just west of Providence. As the students exit the bus, their three adult companions—an Audubon Society educator, a Providence Public Schools teacher and an AfterZone STEM coordinator—gather the kids under a shade tree to discuss the day's activities ahead. Theodora is included with the group that will be conducting avian diversity surveys and bird banding with the Audubon Society educator.



From 9:30 am to 12:00 pm, Theodora's cohort make their way through the woods in the park, enthusiastically calling attention to butterflies, different plant species and evidence of wildlife. The Audubon Society educator encourages their curiosity and enthusiasm, pointing out different species and asking questions that encourage Theodora and the others to think about how humans interact with the environment, how birds and other species get their food and what comprises a healthy ecosystem for birds and other animals.

As she becomes more comfortable, Theodora actively participates in data collection—keeping a written log of what sources of food exist in the park as compared to the species of birds she sees. She helps catch common grackles in humane nets, and handles a wild animal for the first time when she places a tracking band on the grackle's feet. Over the course of the morning, she becomes increasingly more engaged with the other members of her cohort, shedding her initial shyness and expressing interest in the Urban Naturalist's goal of designing a field guide for future park visitors.



At 12:00 pm, Theodora and her fellow Urban Naturalists return to the park's entrance to board the bus back to Gilbert Stuart. Theodora talks excitedly about catching and holding the grackle and shows off a feather she found on the trail. Students from the other cohort talk about their hike to the pond, where they caught dragonflies and put on mud boots to look through pond mud for dragonfly larvae and other sources of food. One boy thought catching dragonflies was “alright,” but that digging in the mud was “nasty” and everyone laughs.



At 12:30 pm, Theodora eats sandwiches and talks about designs for the field guide with her new friends in the school's cafeteria before boarding the bus home at 1:00 pm. At home she tells her dad about all the birds she saw, what it felt like to hold the grackle and what she learned about animals that live in her city's park. That night she starts sketching field guide designs to show the other Urban Naturalists the next day.



A Model of High-Quality Expanded Learning

Providence After School Alliance (PASA) has partnered with the city, the school department and dozens of community organizations to create an afterschool system for the young people of Providence through AfterZones—multi-program campuses anchored by one or more schools. PASA incorporates the principles of high-quality expanded learning in the following ways:

School-Community Partnerships

Community ownership is part of PASA's strategic vision and key to ensure that programs throughout the AfterZone run smoothly. PASA has a governing body that contributes resources and supports to create a successful community model that incorporates grantmaking, staffing and continuous improvement of AfterZone operations.

AfterZone programs are led by a network of over 70 community-based organizations and are funded through a combination of public and private funds raised by PASA and community organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club of Providence, West End Community Center, Providence Housing Authority and John Hope Settlement.

Engaged Learning

AfterZone programs offer opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning and career interest exploration. They include a range of activities not offered during the school day, such as animal care, dancing, ceramics, hands-on science, robotics, soccer and more. Many activities enhance the learning experience by pairing experienced educators with community-based educators who have specialized knowledge in a defined content area.

Family Engagement

PASA offers a variety of ways for families of participants to share in their young person's experience in AfterZone programs. PASA organizes end-of-session events at the end of the fall, winter, spring and summer sessions. These events celebrate and showcase the skills, projects and experiences of AfterZone participants. Additionally, PASA hosts regular "family nights" so that parents of families can see what the youth are learning during their time in the AfterZone. Family nights often include opportunities for families to engage in some of the same hands-on science activities that take place in the STEM-based programs. Finally, families are kept up-to-date with AfterZone and PASA information through PASA's e-News, which readers can sign up for on PASA's website. Some parents also choose to participate in the community councils that govern the AfterZone.

Funding and Partnerships

Sustainable, public-private partnerships are a core feature of the AfterZone system. PASA partners with the City of Providence for funding, leadership and the use of parks and facilities. A partnership with the Providence School District provides middle school students with transportation through the late bussing system, while City Year and AmeriCorps team members provide staff and programming support throughout the AfterZone. PASA receives financial support from a variety of private foundations, including the Wallace Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Rhode Island Foundation and Bank of America.

Learning Time after School and during the Summer

AfterZone programs run four days per week for 26 weeks during the school year and for four weeks during the summer. AfterZone activities are housed on a series of local campuses that include several facilities, including recreation centers, libraries and schools. PASA organizes a transportation system that allows program participants to move from the "home base" facility to any necessary offsite location, such as the Audubon Society of Rhode Island or the Community Boating Center.

Health and Wellness

AfterZone participants are provided healthy daily snacks during the school year, as well as a healthy breakfast and lunch during the summer. Snacks include fruit, a grain and water. Breakfast includes a cereal and juice and lunch consists of a sandwich and juice, milk or water.

The AfterZone also offers a variety of sports programs that promote health and wellness, including soccer, basketball, rugby, flag football and dance.

Affordability and Sustainability

Size: 1,600 youth served across the city of Providence

Annual Operating Cost: Approximately \$1,100 per student