



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.

Eva L. Baker

Distinguished Professor, Divisions of Psychological Studies in Education and Social Research Methodology, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies

The Importance of Afterschool Programs in Education Reform Worldwide: Making It Essential in America

As president of the World Educational Research Association, an organization consisting of American, European, Asian-Pacific, Latin American, African, and Indian-subcontinental research associations, I have given invited talks to international groups in 20 countries in the last 3 years. While so much travel is not wise, I have learned much about educational reform—indeed, much more than the usual stories that we have grown accustomed to hearing. We all know by now, for example, that Finnish schools have much independence, that children in many Asian countries have excellent math skills, or that teacher applicants in many countries are of high academic quality, in part because teaching in those countries is a highly respected profession.

Beyond these comparisons that are now very familiar to us, I have learned that places like Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—well-known for their high academic achievements— all have afterschool programs as a common educational option. Afterschool programs are being regulated in some countries; that is, they must close by 11:00 p.m. so that students do not work too hard! There also is some backlash in these nations directed at the extra money that parents pay year after year to enroll their children in these programs. New developments, such as Korea's comprehensive computer-based system, will provide a platform for afterschool activities, including homework help and other options, to engage students deeply in subject matter. Korea is changing its exam structure, as well, to be more oriented to the performance of complex, multistep tasks. Some of these changes have occurred in a context in which students are also expected to excel in sports, music, and other areas outside the usual U.S. curriculum. Computer systems are in place to support afterschool learning in countries such as Korea, in which broadband connectivity greatly exceeds that in the U.S. and in which afterschool activity is not principally focused on child care.

How are these developments received in the U.S. policy arena, especially in the light of unacceptable U.S. performance on international measures, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)? Such findings are primarily, but not completely, attributable to poorer performance by students in poorer communities, and many of these students also come from minority groups. The U.S. has not, in 50-plus years of attempts to solve this problem, found a scalable way to reduce persistent gaps in performance between black and Hispanic students on the one hand and white and Asian students on the other. There has been some movement, but the overall picture remains unacceptable. Without delving into the myriad plausible explanations for the inability of the U.S. (overall) to develop scalable, effective strategies in the context of the regular school day, let us turn back to U.S. afterschool programs.

Afterschool programs in the U.S. are of different types—public, private, tuition-bearing, free—and are conducted in a variety of settings. These programs may attempt to meet multiple goals: keeping students safe; supporting learning and higher academic achievement; providing mentoring by caring adults to support healthy psycho-social development; extending the school day with practice-oriented materials to reinforce concepts and skills taught earlier in the day; and providing social and intellectual enrichment, such as music, dance, artwork, field trips, and service learning opportunities to instill a broader set of values now missed by many schools that focus their attention almost exclusively on accountability needs.

Do afterschool programs implement findings from research and evaluation? Yes, they do, as many are focused on a simple premise: time-on-task aids learning. Student engagement and interest in learning is a key aspect of time-on-task. Quality afterschool and summer programs therefore increase learning time by providing learning opportunities that are more engaging, broadening young peoples' skills and interests. So which learning tasks are used? In the countries ranking highest on the

Highlander Afterschool Program Helps Students Realize Their Full Potential

Students end every week at the Highlander Charter School's Afterschool Program in Providence, Rhode Island, by participating in "Freedom Friday." Through group projects, school assemblies and performances, field trips, and community service, these Fridays introduce students to a variety of social issues—from bullying to homelessness—and encourage critical evaluation and engagement. This is just one of the many ways the Highlander Afterschool Program takes the education of its students beyond the classroom to help them absorb the lessons from the school day and to develop important skills such as leadership, teamwork, and community involvement.

The Highlander Afterschool Program is integrated seamlessly into the regular school day, connecting its activities to the core curriculum, which reinforces school-day skills and provides students the opportunity to learn new ones in a hands-on, inquiry-based, experiential manner. By effectively leveraging the time outside of school, Highlander is improving academic achievement; data shows a direct connection between student participation in afterschool and performance on the New England Common Assessment Placement (NECAP) exam, with students who participate in 90 days or more of afterschool programming showing 20% greater proficiency in both math and literacy.

PISA, there is increasing variety in afterschool activities; these countries no longer emphasize practicing routine test items. Countries such as Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea are changing their expectations of students' competencies to include the development of character, identity, an understanding of their role in society, and key affective outcomes, such as resiliency and having high aspirations. In addition, they have embraced so-called 21st century skills and are planning to implement strategies and activities that foster creativity and entrepreneurship within these programs.

Why is this information relevant to us? If we cannot import the cultural context that values schools and teachers and that brings parents into close contact with the schools, we must approximate it and adapt these features to our own setting. The U.S. stagnation in performance levels (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011), in graduation rates (Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2011a), productivity in STEM (Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2011b), and the educational component of the credit downgrade should impel us toward the highest goals for educational reforms. Encouragingly, there is some forward movement. The newly developed Common Core State Standards in mathematics and language arts, soon to be augmented by science, can provide clear benchmarks for attainment, with one caveat: The tests developed to assess attainment must be of high quality in terms of their match to learning, as opposed to employing psychometric approaches that merely assess low-order learning.

Returning to afterschool programs, there is a rapidly growing body of evidence that draws on the explosive growth of the field in recent years. This evidence is somewhat mixed, in part because of the considerable variation in afterschool programs. A substantial and growing number of studies, however, support the significant and positive impact of these programs on students and families in myriad ways. These afterschool programs should therefore be granted the same opportunities, including policy and budgetary supports by political leaders, as are being granted to other, more highly-promoted innovations for which the research evidence is mixed and inconclusive—for instance, value-added teacher compensation.

To recap, little is working well in the U.S. school system for those students who will form the majority of our nation's population within the foreseeable future. Better standards will help, if accompanied by high quality assessments (still an unknown), innovative technology, better teacher training, recruiting of highly qualified teachers, and the like. If the U.S. is to begin to regain its leadership in STEM and in intellectual performance, we must use tools available to us now that fit the purposes we have.

Looking at effective reforms that can be quickly adopted, one obvious strategy is to extend time on task, when the "task" is multifaceted learning of content, 21st century skills, social behaviors, and higher personal and academic aspirations—and not merely more focused, uninspiring instruction on narrow, shallow skills. These multifaceted learning goals can be readily embodied in well-designed afterschool programs.

Independent studies of almost two decades have documented, for example, a set of noteworthy findings for students in the LA's BEST afterschool program. There are similar findings, as well, from quality afterschool programs in California's statewide afterschool initiative and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. These programs have the

virtue of point-of-contact operation, ability to adapt rapidly to changing requirements, and the important, but sometime less valued, feature of bringing joy to learning in an exciting, collaborative way. Importantly, these efforts cannot be seen as discretionary. They are essential to a strategy to bring American children back to levels of accomplishment demanded by the future. The following list provides credible research findings that may exceed the evidence base of many other government-supported interventions in two key areas:

Academic Impact

- *Improved test scores (Goldschmidt, Huang, & Chinen, 2007; Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, & Baker, 2000; Huang, Leon, Harven, La Torre, & Mostafavi, 2009; Huang, Leon, & La Torre, 2011; Huang, Leon, La Torre, & Mostafavi, 2008)*
- *Improved school grades (Huang et al., 2011)*
- *Improved school attendance (Huang et al., 2011)*
- *Increased engagement in learning (Huang et al., 2007a; Huang et al., 2000)*
- *Lower dropout rates (Huang, Kim, Marshall, & Perez, 2005)*

Social, Safety, and Family Impacts

- *Provided students safety in dangerous areas (Huang et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2007b)*
- *Strengthened feelings of security by families (Huang et al., 2000)*
- *Bridged the language gap between non-English speaking parents and the school (Huang et al., 2007b)*
- *Improved self-efficacy (Huang et al., 2004)*
- *Made healthier choices in food groups selection and food portions (Huang et al., 2008)*
- *Reduced juvenile crime (Goldschmidt et al., 2007)*
- *Formed productive learner adult relationships (mentors) (Huang et al., 2007a; Huang et al., 2000; Huang et al., 2007b)*

Conclusion

In short, can we name any other reform with this empirical track record and low cost?

Disturbingly, it seems that just as we are learning significantly more from initiatives in the U.S. and abroad about how to maximize and expand learning through engaging afterschool and summer learning opportunities, there are attempts in some states and communities to replace some of these programs with considerably less well-researched alternatives, including some programs and strategies with demonstrably poor results.

Many of these alternatives also appear to be more costly because they do not deploy a collaborative model of school-community-family partnerships. A growing body of evidence suggests that more successful afterschool approaches employ partnerships and collaboration as a core organizing principle. This means, moreover, that that these programs can also be built out, where there is interest, to become more comprehensive community schools, community learning centers, or full-service schools. This simply makes good sense as well, given evidence of their success.

Quality afterschool and summer learning programs have a positive, significant effect on a number of very important aspects of student learning and 21st century skill development. They should be an essential part of the nation's education improvement agenda. Local school districts, municipalities, states, and the federal government should provide the necessary resources to enable more young people to have quality afterschool and summer learning through a collaborative model of school-community-family partnerships.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eva L. Baker is a distinguished professor in UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies; director of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST); and president of the World Education Research Association. As a congressionally appointed member of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing, Baker was chair of the National Research Council Board on Testing and Assessment from 2000 to 2004. She is also a former president of the American Educational Research Association (2006–2007) and was co-chair of the committee to revise the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999). Baker is presently involved in the design of technologically sophisticated testing and evaluation systems of assessment in learning environments for both military and civilian education.

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