



## 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).

**Mark H. Emery**

Administrator, Office of After-School Programs,  
Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools

**Patricia McGrath**

Region 4 Operations Manager, Fairfax County (VA)  
Neighborhood and Community Services

## **Working Together: How a County Government and a School District Joined to Provide All Middle Schools Engaging, Safe, and Effective Afterschool Learning Opportunities**

In Fairfax County, Virginia, the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and the Fairfax County government (FC) have taken the initiative to establish and fund afterschool opportunities for middle school students. This investment and partnership expanded a 2-day afterschool program in some schools to a 5-day program in all 26 FCPS middle schools. Now in its 6th year, the program has generated improvements in academics, behavior, relationships, and school and community connectedness, with an average weekly attendance of over 19,000 students.

### **Demonstrated Need**

The middle school afterschool program was introduced in 2001 when the Fairfax Partnership for Youth (FPY), a local public-private partnership serving as an intermediary, helped establish a mini-grant process to fund afterschool activities. Seed money was provided by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and local school-community coalitions provided matching funds and programming support.

That same year, the results of a countywide youth survey indicated that 57% of respondents spent time at a friend's house without an adult present, 34% spent time at least once a week when no parents were present, and 50% hung out at a mall or in a parking lot three or more times a month. Respondents reported lower-than-average neighborhood attachment and connectedness toward school (Development Research and Programs, 2001).

In response to these survey results, the Fairfax County-Falls Church Community Services Board established a partnership with FCPS and FPY. Using funds from a 3-year Virginia State Incentive Grant, the board adapted selected evidence-based prevention programs to an afterschool environment and provided training for staff. At the same time, FPY received two capacity-building grants from the Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention and formed the Fairfax County After-School Network to increase community awareness of and support for expanded afterschool opportunities.

By spring 2004, all the middle schools were receiving mini-grants to sponsor afterschool activities at least 2 days a week. These activities were a mix of primarily academic support and enrichment and prevention-based programming. Average weekly attendance was about 3,000 students.

During this period, Fairfax County experienced a marked increase in youth gang activity. With more than 100 gangs operating in the county, middle school youth were increasingly recruited to join gangs, with disengaged, immigrant youth most at risk. The documented lack of adult-supervised activities for middle school youth was apparent, and at nearly every Gang Prevention Task Force Forum held throughout the county, the number one prevention initiative discussed was the need to expand middle school afterschool programs.

In fall 2004, the school board invested nearly \$1 million in afterschool programs and formed an Office of After-School Programs (OASP). A year later, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors earmarked over \$3 million to implement a 3-year expansion of afterschool programming to 5 days a week in all 26 middle schools. A school-county collaborative partnership was developed between OASP and the Department of Community and Recreational Services—now Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS)—to implement this initiative; the time frame for full implementation was one year.

### **Coordination Is Key**

Since the end of the 2006–07 school year, all middle schools have had a comprehensive, 5-day afterschool program in place with a full-time afterschool program specialist on site. The afterschool specialist plans, develops, and implements afterschool activities and schedules all community use of the school buildings and grounds. The specialist is a 12-month school employee and is part of the school's administrative team. This structure facilitates a strong link between afterschool and in-school activities and programs—one of the keys to the success of this initiative.

Afterschool programs cannot meet the needs of students, schools, families, and communities, nor are positive outcomes achievable, unless program leaders are strategic and intentional in both design and implementation. Fairfax program leaders took that approach very early in the process by utilizing a theory of change guided by an extensive logic model. Starting with the unique school-county partnership that drove this initiative, the logic model itself summarizes the key elements of the program, articulates outcomes, determines how those outcomes can be measured, and makes the links between the program elements and desired outcomes.

Each middle school develops and implements its own budget and program based on a planning process in which (a) needs are initially identified, (b) specific programs and activities are selected to address those needs, (c) outcomes are aligned to the goals, and (d) performance measures are established for assessment. As the needs of each school are different, the goals, program activities, and outcomes also differ. Each afterschool program must address the four key strategies that stem from the logic model: academic support and enrichment; social skills and youth development; physical, health, and recreation support; and family and community involvement. Each afterschool activity is linked to one of these strategies and, in turn, is aligned with one or more of the school division's student achievement goals: academics, essential life skills, and responsibility to the community, thereby linking all activities to the school day.

The 2011–12 school year marks the 6th year of the 5-day afterschool program, which runs from regular dismissal times until as late as 6:00 p.m. in 26 middle schools. An additional middle school provides a 3-day afterschool program. FCPS provides late bus transportation 3 days per week, and there is parent pick up all 5 days. The program is free and open to all middle school students.

The FCPS-FC afterschool program helps students meet local and state academic standards and offers students a broad array of enrichment activities. Each middle school has outreach efforts in place to recruit underserved and underrepresented students into academic enrichment activities. Counselors, classroom teachers, and afterschool staff work collaboratively to identify students who may be struggling academically or socially and then recruit and encourage those students to participate in academic support programs and other activities.

FCPS-FC has received a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant that supports two middle schools. Local resources support the afterschool program at these schools, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds support a summer school initiative. Additionally, a number of ethnically diverse community partners provide student and parent support and a parent literacy program at these schools. With the exception of the summer program and community partnership base, there is almost no difference between the afterschool activities at the 21st Century Community Learning Centers sites and the other middle schools.

This prevention-based afterschool initiative was implemented with a fully integrated evaluation model and outcomes measures. Program outcomes are examined through multiple measures: planned and unplanned site observations; quarterly progress reports that include process measures, as well as correlations between dosage in afterschool and changes in grades, absenteeism, and discipline referrals; student, teacher, staff, and parent surveys; and academic and behavioral data. Correlations among these multiple measures are investigated to obtain a more complete picture of the impact of the program.

Counselors, classroom teachers, and afterschool staff work collaboratively to identify students who may be struggling academically or socially.

## Major Outcomes

What have been some of the key outcomes and benefits of the FCPS-FC Middle School After-School Program?

- *Increased academic performance. Between the 2005–06 and 2010–11 school years, there was a 54% reduction in the percent of Ds and Fs in core subjects—English, math, science, and social studies (Fairfax County Public Schools[FCPS], 2011b). Of those students who received one or more Fs in a core subject, 72% attended less than 30 days of afterschool (FCPS, 2011c).*
- *Increased classroom participation. 79% of classroom teachers agree or strongly agree that classroom participation of afterschool participants has improved (FCPS, 2010).*
- *Improved homework completion rates. 72 percent of classroom teachers agree or strongly agree that homework completion rates of afterschool participants have improved (FCPS, 2010).*
- *Improved student behavior. 73 percent of classroom teachers agree or strongly agree that the classroom behavior of afterschool participants has improved (FCPS, 2010). Of those students who received a behavior infraction, 73 percent attended less than 30 days of afterschool (FCPS, 2011c).*
- *Better peer relations, emotional adjustment. 83 percent of parents agree or strongly agree that their child seems happier or less-stressed since attending afterschool (FCPS, 2011a).*
- *Better attitudes towards school. 84 percent of parents agree or strongly agree that their child has a better attitude towards school (FCPS, 2011a).*
- *Reduced gang crime. There has been a 32 percent drop in youth gang activity between 2006 and 2008 as afterschool attendance doubled (Fairfax County Coordinating Council on Gang Prevention, 2007).*

## Conclusion

Much of the success of this initiative can be attributed to the strong collaborative partnership between school, school district, and county government staff charged with developing and implementing this effort. Other strategies that have been integral to its success include

- *conducting youth surveys and needs assessments,*
- *having a structural base and action plan in place and ready to go when resources became available,*
- *designating site directors as full-time staff and part of the school's administrative team,*
- *linking local school and community needs to afterschool activities and outcomes,*
- *having teachers and administrators who saw the needs within their school that could be met by afterschool,*
- *incorporating afterschool as an integral part of the school day without replicating the school day,*

- *leveraging existing financial commitments and personnel,*
- *having the support and leadership of school principals, and*
- *being accountable.*

The afterschool program is a key element in the efforts of the school division and the county to improve academic performance, develop healthy and successful youth, and combat gangs. The program is not intended to be regarded simply as child care or as a mere extension of the school day. On the contrary, it provides each participating youth with greater opportunities to form relationships with caring adults; to contribute to the community; to acquire new skills in a supportive environment; to be safe and secure; to form healthy relationships with peers; and to develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to thrive in the workplaces and communities of the 21st century.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Mark H. Emery** is administrator of the Office of After-School Programs, Fairfax County Public Schools, where he oversees the development and implementation of afterschool programs in 27 middle schools. He is chair of the Virginia Partnership on Out-of-School Time and a board member of the Fairfax Partnership for Youth and the Fairfax County Boys' and Girls' Club. Emery formerly served as director of extended learning and development for the Council of Chief State School Officers and chair of the Fairfax County School Board. He is retired from the Naval Research Laboratory and holds a Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Iowa.

**Patricia McGrath** is the Region 4 Operations Manager for Neighborhood and Community Services in Fairfax County, Virginia. She was the division supervisor for teens, as well as branch manager for middle school afterschool programs for the Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Services. McGrath has over 20 years of experience in prevention program development and evaluation.

---

## REFERENCES

Development Research and Programs, Inc. (2001). *Communities That Care: Fairfax County survey of youth risks and assets*. Retrieved from Fairfax County, Virginia, website: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demogrph/pdf/youth2001.pdf>

Fairfax County Coordinating Council on Gang Prevention. (2007). *Fairfax County gang prevention 2005–2006 status report*. Retrieved from [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gangprevention/gangpreventionreport\\_092407.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/gangprevention/gangpreventionreport_092407.pdf)

Fairfax County Public Schools. (2010). [After-school program teacher survey]. Unpublished raw data.

Fairfax County Public Schools. (2011a). [After-school program parent survey]. Unpublished raw data.

Fairfax County Public Schools. (2011b). [Enrollment and marks, 2005–06 through 2010–11]. Unpublished Education Decision Support Library data.

Fairfax County Public Schools. (2011c). [Student Information System reports]. Unpublished raw data.