



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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Creating the Recent Force Field: A Growing Infrastructure for Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Opportunities

Over the past 15 years, an increasingly vital and complex infrastructure has helped fuel and sustain the afterschool and summer learning movements. With the aid of both formal and informal intermediaries, this evolving infrastructure works to improve quality and increase access in order to help more young people catch up, keep up, and get ahead in engaging, safe, and supervised settings. This infrastructure has helped more than two million young people participate in afterschool and summer learning opportunities over the past 10 years.

No one agency, organization, or group is responsible at the community, state, or national level for the hours from 3:00–6:00 p.m. on weekdays or in the summer while most parents are working. Despite the increase in availability of afterschool and summer programs, 15 million children still go home alone with no adult supervision during these hours. Many schools, educators, families, and community- and faith-based organizations seek to fill these gaps with positive developmental experiences and expanded learning opportunities, but too often these programs can be disconnected, underfunded, and underutilized in many communities.

To meet these challenges, this growing infrastructure for expanded learning, both after the school day ends and during the summertime, provides the supports and resources that would be impossible for any single program or organization to create. Public funding has been critical, fueled by the growth in federal funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative since 1997 and in some cases by growth in state funding, such as California's After School Education and Safety program. Notably, quality systems have grown exponentially with the development and the adoption of

quality standards now established in more than 34 states. The articles in this section of *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* focus in detail on some of the elements of this essential infrastructure.

Below we summarize some of the recent dynamics of this unique infrastructure by looking at five critical components of the current afterschool “force field.” This sometimes invisible but veritable force field of organizations, policies, funding, networks, and research creates opportunities and removes barriers to expanded learning opportunities for millions of young people in rural and suburban communities, as well as small towns and large urban areas nationwide.

Afterschool Force Field

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FORCE #1: Federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers program

Broad bipartisan support contributed to the creation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1994. This bipartisanship has extended across the years in securing the reauthorization of the initiative in Title IV, Part B of the ESEA, as amended in 2002, and also in generating substantial increases in federal appropriations for the initiative from 1997 to 2012.

The consistency and growth of the program—from \$1 million in 1997 to more than \$1 billion 15 years later—has been a major catalyst for the field. Local 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs serve as models of best practice, help define quality, provide professional development, and focus on academic outcomes, thus compelling all kinds of afterschool programs to be more intentional in their design and approach. The shift of responsibility for awarding 21st Century Community Learning Center grants in 2002 from the federal to the state level led to state education agencies assigning staff and even creating divisions with responsibility for administering the program and supporting quality afterschool in their state. These entities not only manage grant competitions and monitor programs but also support the development of program indicators and sponsor conferences and trainings that deepen understanding of effective afterschool programming.

Community-school partnerships are required for successful 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. Along with family engagement, these collaborations are unique features of the type of innovative learning opportunities that 21st Century Community Learning Centers created as compared to most other federally or state-funded programs.

A number of national, regional, state, and local foundations have contributed to the development of quality programming and support networks for these community learning centers. From the beginning, the C. S. Mott Foundation has been a critical ally in this growth and the nationwide infrastructure it represents.

As of May 2012, there were 4,619 21st Century Community Learning Centers local grantees funding afterschool and summer programs for almost 1.7 million children and youth in 11,068 school-based and community-based centers across the country (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). The program is so popular and competitive that only one out of three local requests for funding is awarded. Over the last 10 years, \$4 billion in local grant requests had to be denied because of the lack of adequate federal funding and intense competition (O'Donnell & Ford, 2013).

Many state departments of education, along with other state and community partners, are aggressively working to improve the quality and results of expanded learning programs, while at the same time keeping the programming relevant and attuned to the needs of today's students. Several articles in the Infrastructure section of *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* present in-depth the strategies states are taking to keep afterschool and summer 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs constantly improving and addressing contemporary issues.

Several states have moved to expand learning beyond the traditional school day and year through positive new working relationships among classroom teachers and community-based practitioners, or “second-shift” educators. The biggest such state initiative, both in terms of the number of programs affected as well as the scale of investment, is in California where several thousand schools with community partners are helping expand education and enrichment opportunities to tens of thousands of struggling and low-income students. In many ways, the California program is working in parallel and in concert with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. This is an important approach from which other states could learn to make large-scale policy improvements in expanded learning.

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FORCE #2: Statewide afterschool networks: Coalitions for policy, funding, and quality

Weaving the voices of many into one collective and strategic policy agenda is a fundamental element of the force field that is provided by statewide afterschool networks. Now in 41 states, these networks are designed to create sustainable structures of statewide, regional, and local partnerships, particularly school-community partnerships, focused on supporting policy development at all levels.

These statewide entities of grassroots and grasstops leaders—from the governors' office and legislature to business, education, and community leaders—are driving the movement and leveraging a vast array of resources into expanded learning programs. With modest but consistent investment from the C. S. Mott Foundation and other national, state, and local funders, the networks do “a little with a lot” by focusing relentlessly on a common agenda to expand program availability and ensure quality learning experiences.

Over the past 12 years these networks grew from a simple idea to a powerful force now emerging in all 50 states.

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FORCE #3: Citywide systems: Coordinating data, dollars, and development

With the statewide afterschool networks force at the state level, a complementary force is rising from cities and communities to link out-of-school-time players and stakeholders. At the local level, intermediaries connect public and private funders with providers, serving as the nucleus and guiding coordinator within a community's multifaceted network of government, schools, nonprofit organizations, and expanded learning programs. The Wallace Foundation has played a pivotal role in seeding intermediaries in a number of cities.

Some of the most influential leaders in the country are mayors and local municipal leaders who understand deeply that young people need more opportunities to succeed. They are taking the charge of advancing learning by coordinating the work of municipal agencies, including parks and recreation departments, human services offices, museum and library systems, arts organizations, housing authorities, and other public service entities. Equally impressive, local leaders from United Ways, faith communities, and community-based organizations are stepping up to develop systems of support—realizing the value of collaboration rather than operating in isolation.

The depth of this element of the afterschool infrastructure is apparent in the work of the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute). Here, a national membership organization is supporting summits and online learning communities with mayors, council members, and other municipal leaders and their staffs to inform local officials about the education, public safety, and economic development benefits of afterschool. It is providing new tools to improve local programs, from Connecticut and Texas to Minnesota and North Carolina to Washington State and Tennessee.

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FORCE #4: Established body of research and evidence

Now we know: quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities work. We know that quality expanded learning programs are associated with increased academic performance, increased attendance in school, significant improvements in behavior and social and emotional development, and greater opportunities for hands-on learning in important areas that are not typically available during the traditional school day. Throughout *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* are numerous examples that define and demonstrate engaged and enriched learning.

Other sections of *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* compendium detail the research, including the strong, comprehensive meta-analysis by Joseph Durlak (Loyola University Chicago) and Roger Weissberg (University of Illinois at Chicago) and the longitudinal work by Deborah Vandell (University of California-Irvine) and the Harvard Family Research Project. The recent significant growth and depth of the research and best practice base is a very positive force.

Just 15 years ago, tools and materials were limited to a few quality sources such as the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and organizations in the community education field. Now there are thousands of tools and resources available. The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)'s Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Research and Evaluation Database (www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/ost-database-bibliography), led by Heather Weiss, is a compilation of profiles written by HFRP of research studies and evaluations of OST programs and initiatives. The National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks (www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/) has more than 500 resources to support systems-building. The Finance Project's Out of School Time Information Resource Center (www.financeproject.org/index.cfm?page=25) shares resources that help leaders address financing and sustainability issues for out-of-school time programs. The National Summer Learning Association maintains a summer learning library and produces extensive research briefs (www.summerlearning.org/?page=library), and the Afterschool Alliance presents hundreds of research summaries and issue briefs, including a summary of studies documenting afterschool outcomes (www.afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm).

New continuous improvement tools and reports, some highlighted in this Infrastructure section of *Expanding Minds and Opportunities*, provide an unequivocal force supporting and propelling quality expanded learning opportunities across the country.

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FORCE #5: Building the movement: The Afterschool Alliance

Finally, there is a growing interconnection of many diverse groups, including educational and youth development institutions and community, cultural, and scientific organizations, working to expand and enrich learning in engaging and broadening ways. Not too long ago these schools and community and faith-based organizations were largely disconnected.

The Afterschool Alliance, formed in 1999, is connecting diverse and important players from the local, state, and national levels in the expanded learning space to come together for the common purpose of building public will to strengthen the infrastructure for expanded learning. At the federal level, the Afterschool Alliance is a leading voice for children, youth, families, and communities, dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and advocating for more afterschool investments.

Each October, the Afterschool Alliance annually hosts Lights On! Afterschool—an essential grassroots education and advocacy effort. In 2012, more than one million people gathered at more than 9,000 sites across the country and at U.S. military bases worldwide to participate in an unparalleled rally for afterschool programs.

The Afterschool Alliance produces and disseminates a vast array of fact sheets, issue briefs, research, and polling information that have come to be highly regarded. Its report *America After 3PM* (2009), the nation's most in-depth study of how America's children spend their afternoons, finds that 15 million young people—more than a quarter of our nation's children—are alone and unsupervised after school.

Conclusion

The force field for expanded learning opportunities is comprised of more individuals and institutions than can be named in one article. Notable forces that have contributed mightily to the force field include the National AfterSchool Association, which connects afterschool professionals; Foundations, Inc., which provides high quality professional development; the Coalition for Community Schools, which helps build up and out afterschool programs into community schools and community learning centers; and the Coalition for Building After-School Systems, which builds citywide afterschool systems. The new Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project shares cutting-edge best practices. The American Institutes for Research's Profile and Performance Information Collection System (PPICS) is designed to inform and improve the 21st Century Community Learning Centers across the United States.

Education, community, and state leaders, as well as foundations and national organizations can and should now capitalize on this infrastructure to advance cutting edge learning and youth development.

The evidence of the force field is also seen in emerging special interest groups, such as the American Educational Research Association OST Special Interest Group (SIG), and the Grantmakers for Education's Out of School Time Funders Network. Successful afterschool programs have also benefited greatly from the leadership and resources of independent community and faith-based programs; many local, regional and national foundations; and affiliates of major, nationwide organizations such as the Ys, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Communities in Schools. Additionally, statewide and regional conferences and the nation's regional education labs have contributed significantly to the identification and spread of best practices.

The articles in *Expanding Minds and Opportunities* demonstrate the recent breadth, depth, and growth of the infrastructure supporting quality expanded learning opportunities in afterschool and summers. Education, community, and state leaders, as well as foundations and national organizations can and should now capitalize on this infrastructure to advance cutting edge learning and youth development.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Terry K. Peterson is called “the King of Afterschool” by former United States Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. Terry has a long and successful history of helping local, state, and national organizations develop strategies and partnerships for comprehensive education reform and expanded learning opportunities. He has worked internationally in Argentina, Mongolia, Brazil, Northern Ireland, China, and South Korea. He currently is Senior Fellow and Director of the Afterschool and Community Learning Network at the College of Charleston.

Steve Fowler of FowlerHoffman LLC—consultants on communications strategies for system and policy change—contributes to several initiatives on expanded learning opportunities for children and youth in afterschool and summer programs. He is currently also serving as an advisor to SRI International’s project on the role of social networks in disseminating science content in California’s afterschool system. His hands-on experience as a state senator in Nebraska taught him how policy making and budgeting really work.

Terri Ferinde Dunham has managed the National Network of Statewide Afterschool Networks for 10 years, building an infrastructure for network development. As a partner at Collaborative Communications Group, she works with foundations, nonprofits, government agencies, and communities to reimagine when, where, and how children and adults learn. Currently, she also leads the Expanded Learning and Afterschool project, working to promote afterschool and summer learning programs as sustainable affordable approaches for expanding learning. Previously, she held outreach and communications positions for 10 years at the United States Department of Education under Republican and Democratic administrations.

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