



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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Oregon’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers: A Key Component of Student Success in College, Work, and Citizenship

In 2011, Oregon’s legislature affirmed a clear and ambitious education goal for the state, known as the “40-40-20” goal. This goal states that by 2025, 40% of adult Oregonians will hold a bachelor’s or advanced degree, 40% will have an associate’s degree or a meaningful postsecondary certificate, and *all* adult Oregonians will hold a high school diploma or equivalent—including the remaining 20% who will likely choose not to pursue post-secondary education beyond a high school diploma. Leaders across the state have been working to advance Oregon’s educational attainment rates, but the passage of the goal into law through Oregon Senate Bill 253 has prompted a new drive for action and change.

Against that backdrop, Oregon’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers have been working to increase academic achievement to enable students to close the achievement gap. Every year more than 25,000 students attend 128 centers located in areas of high poverty across the state of Oregon. According to a 2011–12 report by Learning Point Associates, teachers report that

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- *72% of the attendees in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool programs improved in their academic performance, and*
- *2/3 increased their rates of homework completion (Learning Point Associates, 2012).*

The passage of Senate Bill 253 has now intensified the necessity of offering even stronger academically based programs, along with enrichment activities that expand students' intellectual and developmental horizons. So it is more important than ever that Oregon's afterschool programs learn from and use current research to make improvements.

Expanded Learning Opportunities and Time

Building systems of support and sustainability, while ensuring quality programming, is the overriding mission of Oregon's 21st Century Community Learning Centers office at the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Oregon's expanded learning activities and enrichment services, implemented by local programs and community partners, provide students with rich learning experiences that prepare them for success in college, in the workplace, and as citizens.

Outcomes of expanded learning time depend on many factors, including how effectively the extra time and opportunities are used and to whom they are directed. As Silva (2007) points out,

Research shows that extending the right kind of time to the students who need it most can improve student learning and effectively close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their more affluent peers...But the preponderance of evidence on extending time in schools suggests that the benefits of adding to the school day or year are by no means certain or universal (p. 9).

Programs that focus on specific, predetermined academic and social outcomes tend to have a greater impact than those that focus too narrowly on academic outcomes or, alternately, those that lack focus or specified outcome goals. Programs are most successful when they offer a variety of structured, age-appropriate choices, when the environment is supportive, and when the experience is not perceived as punitive. According to a 2005 RAND Corporation report, nine common characteristics are associated with high-quality, effective out-of-school-time programs:

- *a clear mission*
- *high expectations and positive social norms*
- *a safe and healthy environment*
- *a supportive emotional climate*
- *a small total enrollment*
- *stable, trained personnel*
- *appropriate content and pedagogy, relative to the children's needs and the program's mission, with opportunities to engage*
- *integrated family and community partners*
- *frequent assessments (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005, p. xv)*

Given the emerging research on afterschool program quality and its relationship to outcomes, it is clear that...quality afterschool programs also share the following features: appropriate supervision and structure, an environment that fosters positive youth-adult relationships, intentional programming with opportunities for autonomy and choice, and good relationships among the various settings in which program participants spend their day (Little, 2007, p. 8).

In the Oregon Department of Education, efforts are being made to increase sustained participation in well-designed afterschool programs because studies have shown that all children, particularly disadvantaged children, may gain a host of benefits that lead to better overall educational outcomes. Many of these are also building blocks specifically to improve student achievement. (See Durlak and Weissberg's article elsewhere in this volume, which finds that broad-based, quality programs have a positive effect on achievement and test scores.)

Oregon's Leading Indicators for Program Quality

Based on the growing research and evaluation studies that show afterschool and summer programs can and do make a positive difference, the Oregon 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, in collaboration with the Oregon Leading Indicators Advisory Group; long-time partner Oregon Afterschool for Kids Network (Oregon ASK); and staff at the American Institutes for Research, developed leading indicators for program quality and continuous improvement.

The following are Oregon's defined leading indicators by category:

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Collaboration and Partnership

- *Partners associated with the center are actively involved in planning, decision making, evaluating, and supporting the operations of the afterschool program.*
- *Staff from partner organizations are meaningfully involved in the provision of activities at the center.*
- *Staff at the center will be engaged in intentional efforts to collaborate and communicate frequently about ways to improve program quality.*
- *Steps are taken by the center to establish linkages to the school day and use data on student academic achievement to inform programming.*

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Staff

- *Staff at the center are provided with training and/or professional development.*
- *Staff at the center complete one or more self-assessments during the programming period.*
- *Staff at the center are periodically evaluated/assessed during the program period.*

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Intentionality in Student Program Offerings

- *There is evidence of alignment between (a) program objectives relative to supporting youth development, (b) student needs, and (c) program philosophy/model and the frequency/extent to which key opportunities and supports are provided to youth.*
- *There is evidence of alignment between (a) program objectives relative to the academic development of students, (b) student needs, and (c) program philosophy/model and activities being provided at the center.*
- *There is evidence of intentionality in activity and session design among staff responsible for the delivery of activities intended to support student growth and development in mathematics and reading/language arts.*

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Intentionality in Family Program Offerings

- *Steps are taken by the center to reach out and communicate with parents and adult family members of participating students.*
- *There is evidence of alignment between (a) program objectives relative to supporting family literacy and related development, (b) family needs, and (c) program philosophy/model and activities being provided at the center.*

These indicators demonstrate clear connections that school day and data analysis are key elements on the path to strengthening the capacity and quality of afterschool programs statewide.

Initiatives for Student Success in Strategic Areas

With a strong foundation in the basics of systems building, 21st Century Community Learning Centers program grantees are required to integrate statewide programs in the areas of reading and math, with additional options for federally funded science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and English language acquisition initiatives that match their program and community partners' vision of desired program outcomes. Describing measures of growth for anticipated student academic and social outcomes has become a critical part of program quality and improvement. The strategic alignment of extended learning opportunities with school day academic programs increases program effectiveness and the quality of each child's experience in afterschool programs.

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The primary academic initiative for 2011–12 was provided with support from Oregon’s STEM leadership team. A two-phase program, emphasizing regional partnerships and professional development for paid and volunteer staff resulted in 25 of the 31 grantees receiving approved STEM implementation grants. Five of the implementing programs also qualified for professional development STEM grants. The outcomes included increased student access to technology, science, math, and engineering during the extended learning time offered afterschool and during the summer, as well as increased teacher training for improved program quality. What follows are two examples of program successes in Oregon with the STEM initiative: Salem-Keizer Education Foundation and Springfield Public School Afterschool Programs.

There is growing enthusiasm for Salem-Keizer Education Foundation’s (SKEF) successful school gardens program, which is one component of their 21st Century Community Learning Centers’ STEM offerings. In partnership with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Marion-Polk Food Share, Life Source, and countless volunteers, students are tending to their school gardens on a daily basis and are enjoying the harvest for lunch. The program will open a new aquaponic greenhouse during the winter of 2012–13. SKEF is also the first program in Oregon to implement Mouse Squad, a nationally acclaimed program that creates technology-based opportunities for student success in today’s information society.

For the past 5 years, Springfield Public School Afterschool Programs have provided students in grades 1–12 with a variety of hands-on STEM programs. Building bridges between school-day and out-of-school-time instruction, the Hamlin Middle School STEM Summer Program offered three 1-week robotics sessions in July 2012. At Springfield High School, afterschool students in the Music Recording Studio learn songwriting, basic music theory, digital audio engineering, beat production and studio management. They write their own lyrics and sing and record their own songs. Springfield’s afterschool classes are designed to support quality academic and career-related experiences while sparking students’ imagination and creativity.

New Emphasis on Program Sustainability

Since the system of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs across Oregon anticipates a decline in funding rates in the coming years, program sustainability has become a focus of program quality planning. Importantly, to build broader ownership for sustainability, the Oregon Department of Education recently provided funding for the statewide afterschool alliance affiliate OregonASK to present a statewide webinar for all 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees on program sustainability. The Finance Project, based in Washington, DC, facilitated the webinar.

Currently 11 Oregon 21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees are working through an intensive program of sustainability planning exercises facilitated by OregonASK Americorps/VISTA volunteers. Building a local sustainability team is the launching point for the great work of Oregon’s programs to continue into 2012–13, resulting in a strategy for the inevitable reduced levels of state funding as the programs mature.

Conclusion

Oregon's statewide infrastructure of support and collaboration to provide academic enrichment opportunities for students, coupled with the innovation of local district programs and partners, create a powerful combination of quality afterschool services and supports for Oregon youth in 21st Century Community Learning Center programs. These programs will contribute significantly to the achievement of Oregon's 40-40-20 goal, and they are a tremendous learning resource for many struggling students across the state.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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