



# 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).

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## **School-Community Learning Partnerships: Essential to Expanded Learning Success**

For the past decade the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has asked schools to work in partnership with community- and faith-based organizations to support children's learning during the hours after school and during the summertime. Consequently, there has been tremendous growth across the nation in intentional efforts to forge meaningful partnerships between schools and afterschool and summer programs.

Increasingly, the field is recognizing that these partnerships are essential to efforts to expand *when, where, how, and what* students learn (Little, 2011). This article begins with an overview of the benefits of school-community partnerships to students, schools, and community organizations. It then examines the role of partnerships in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, reviewing national data on the numbers and kinds of partners that 21st Century Community Learning Centers nationwide are engaging with to support student success. The article concludes with a discussion of four features of effective learning partnerships.

## The Benefits of School-Community Partnerships

When schools and community organizations work together to support learning, everyone benefits. Partnerships can serve to strengthen, support, and even transform individual partners, resulting in improved program quality, more efficient use of resources, and better alignment of goals and curricula (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010).

First and foremost, learning partnerships can support student outcomes (see, for example, Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008). For example, the *Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study* found that afterschool programs with stronger relationships with school teachers and principals were more successful at improving students' homework completion, homework effort, positive behavior, and initiative. This may be because positive relationships with schools can foster high quality, engaging, and challenging activities, along with promoting staff engagement (Miller, 2005).

In addition to supporting student learning directly, partnerships can have additional benefits to students and their families. They can

- *provide continuity of services across the day and year, easing school transitions and promoting improved attendance in after school programs;*
- *facilitate access to a range of learning opportunities and developmental supports, providing opportunities for students and teachers alike to experiment with new approaches to teaching and learning;*
- *facilitate information sharing about specific students to best support individual learning; and*
- *provide family members with alternative entry points into the school day to support their student's learning.*

### Using Partners to Complement Program Offerings

Being a Lifelong Achiever Starts Today (BLAST) is a 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative program in Atlanta, Georgia. It has an effective collaboration with Atlanta Memorial Hospital and New Attitudes Health and Fitness Center. Students are taught and mentored to help improve their lifestyle by making dietary changes and exercising properly and regularly. Students have access to a full array of health professionals and services at the center and can participate in a 10-week wellness program. At the end of the 10-week course, known as "The Body Shop," the student who has made the greatest transformation receives a New Attitudes membership. This membership provides access to the entire wellness and fitness center for one year. Many students also learn how to swim and overcome their fear of the water. Since there is no community pool or community gym available, this partnership has made resources available to students that would otherwise not be available to them (Manhattan Strategy Group, 2011).

Learning partnerships can also greatly benefit schools. They can

- *complement the academic curriculum with a wider range of services and activities, particularly enrichment and arts activities that may not be available during the school day;*
- *support transitions across the school years, particularly the critical middle to high school transition, which research indicates is a key predictor of high school graduation (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007);*
- *reinforce concepts taught in school without replicating the school day, often exposing classroom teachers working in the after school program to new pedagogies;*
- *improve school culture and community image through exhibitions and performances that help “shine the light” on students whose talents may not be apparent in the classroom; and*
- *gain access to mentors, afterschool staff, and other resources to support in school learning and improve the teaching and learning in the classroom itself.*

Finally, learning partnerships with schools can strengthen and support community partners. They can

- *help gain access to and recruit groups of students most in need of support services;*
- *improve program quality and staff engagement, particularly when there is crossover between school and community organization staff;*
- *foster better alignment of programming to support a shared vision for learning, one which aligns curriculum to support state and local standards; and*
- *maximize resource use such as facilities, staff, data, and curriculum.*

### **Community Partners Can Support School Partners**

Roger Williams, a Title I School in Providence, Rhode Island, is one of three anchor schools for a wide range of afterschool programs in the South Side/West End AfterZone supported and coordinated by the Providence After School Alliance (PASA). While Roger Williams struggles to make AYP, its partnership with PASA, city agencies, and community-based organizations to expand afterschool services has contributed to improved school performance. The partnership with PASA has played a critical role in improving the scale and quality of afterschool services at Roger Williams, currently reaching more than 360 youth in 45 different programs. Funding and staffing support from PASA has provided resources to expand academic and enrichment program options and double the number of participants. PASA also improves program quality by supporting partnerships with high quality providers that include community-based organizations, individual instructors, the school district, and the local police department (Providence After School Alliance, internal communication, 2011).

## The Role of Partnerships in 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Partnerships are a critical component of 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and each year since 2006 the number of partners has continued to grow. By 2010, the 3,450 funded grantees engaged over 30,000 partners, with an average of almost 9 partners per grantee. Community-based organizations were the most common partners in 2010, almost three times higher than any other type of partner. For-profit corporations and school districts were the second and third most utilized partners, with colleges and universities also playing a main partnership role.

Partners perform a number of important roles: They offer programming, provide in-kind services, and provide paid and volunteer staffing (see Table 1). Further, Table 1 illustrates that more partners have steadily made more contributions to 21st Century Community Learning Centers over the past 5 years.

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*Table 1. Number of grants with a partner providing a given contribution type across 5 years of annual performance reporting.*

Partner Contribution	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Programming	2,464	2,582	2,695	2,881	3,139
Paid Staffing	1,782	1,814	1,906	1,965	2,046
Volunteer Staffing	1,833	1,924	1,933	2,042	2,185
In-Kind Goods	2,113	2,246	2,351	2,477	2,698
Funding	813	872	968	915	929
Evaluation Services	1,043	1,076	1,049	1,078	1,160

### School Day Staff Can Support Student and Staff Recruitment Efforts

The City Day Extended Academy Mentoring Program is a 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative program in Salt Lake City, Utah. To create cohesion between the school-day and afterschool programs, school day teachers are highly involved in the planning and implementation of programs, and all afterschool staff must follow the same policies and procedures regardless of site. Staff are recruited for specific roles within the programs. The Project Director creates a list of required qualifications for particular programs that principals must heed when hiring afterschool staff. Along with the Project Director's recommendations, consulting teachers in the district complete staff observations and provide a list of individuals who have demonstrated skills and characteristics that may be well suited to the afterschool program. Principals make a concerted effort to hire program staff who have been with the district for 3 or more years and who have appropriate professional licenses; new teachers, or those changing grade levels, are not actively recruited in order to allow them sufficient time to get acclimated before gaining additional responsibility within the district (Manhattan Strategy Group, 2011).

Analysis of the financial support that partners contribute by providing the services listed above reveals that in 2010 alone, partners contributed over \$230 million to the 3,450 initiative grantees. Over the past 5 years partners have contributed over \$1 billion to support 21st Century Community Learning Centers programming.

Together, these data suggest that partners are an essential component of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative and they have been growing significantly in all dimensions over the past 5 years. Partners provide vital in-kind services and supports, as well as real dollars, which add significant value to the work of 21st Century Community Learning Centers. As centers consider bringing on more partners it is important that project and site directors understand how to develop and cultivate effective partnerships. The next part of this article discusses the features of effective partnerships.

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## Features of Effective School-Community Partnerships

There is emerging consensus on an inter-related set of features that help promote and sustain healthy school-community partnerships (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010):

- **A shared vision for learning and developmental outcomes for students.** *This vision acknowledges the critical, complementary roles of schools, community partners, and families. A shared vision also helps partners avoid working against each other and instead pursue a common vision of student success. When school leaders embrace a vision for student success that considers students' physical, emotional, and social well-being in addition to academic outcomes, the partnership is more likely to be successful than when competing agendas operate during the expanded learning day.*
- **A diverse set of partners with effective communications mechanisms and relationships among multiple staff at multiple levels.** *Strong and sustainable partnerships need relationships that are built at multiple levels (for example, at the district, school, and classroom levels) and among multiple school staff, including district and nonteaching staff. Working with partners at different levels helps the afterschool and summer programs become integral to the daily life and culture of the school at all levels, from the principal to the custodian. In addition, relationships at various levels can help mitigate the effects of staff turnover at other levels; for example, strong relationships with teachers can help sustain the partnership in the event of a change in principals.*

- **Intentionally blended staffing with role clarity to promote understanding of how the work is relevant to all.** *For afterschool and summer programs, this means hiring staff who have legitimacy in the school building and who are skilled at building relationships with school staff. Some programs do this by hiring licensed teachers, people who “speak the same language” as school-day teachers, can substitute and consult in classrooms, and can participate in professional development activities. Hiring licensed teachers who also teach at a host school facilitates information sharing and forges connections with other teachers who might not otherwise make time for “outside” programs or services. Blended staffing may also mean a liaison who serves an important bridging function between the school and the afterschool or summer program.*
- **Clear data-sharing processes and agreements.** *One feature of a strong collaboration is the ability of partners to access information and data from each other, including, if possible, student-level academic data (e.g., test scores and grades). Afterschool and summer programs can use these data both to track and strengthen student performance and to demonstrate the impact of their services. In addition to getting data from schools, some programs provide their own data to schools to promote reciprocal data sharing.*

As efforts to expand learning opportunities and time continue to grow under a variety of approaches and models—whether afterschool, summer learning, expanded or extended learning day or year, or out-of-school time—it is important that all these efforts build on the strong base of effective partnerships already present among schools and afterschool and summer programs, capitalizing in particular on the rich history of partnerships advanced by 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

## For More Information

### School-Community Partnership Resources

- **Afterschool: The Bridge Connecting Schools and Communities**  
[www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/afterschool-bridge-connecting-schools-and-communities](http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/afterschool-bridge-connecting-schools-and-communities). This brief highlights how afterschool programs can serve as bridges that connect schools and communities, positively benefiting youth and families, schools, community-based organizations, and the community as a whole.
- **A Guide for School Principals**  
[www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/guide-school-principals](http://www.statewideafterschoolnetworks.net/guide-school-principals). This guide was produced by The After-School Corporation (TASC) to help support principals in their efforts to build and sustain partnerships with TASC-funded afterschool programs.
- **Meaningful Linkages between Summer Programs, Schools, and Community Partners: Conditions and Strategies for Success**  
[www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Meaningful%20Linkages%20full%20report%20rev%2010.09.pdf](http://www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Meaningful%20Linkages%20full%20report%20rev%2010.09.pdf). This report documents and describes how to create and sustain meaningful partnerships between high-quality summer learning programs and schools.
- **Afterschool: The Bridge Connecting Schools and Communities**  
[http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue\\_30\\_bridge.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_30_bridge.cfm). This issue brief describes the benefits of family, school, and community partnerships.
- **Strengthening Connections Between Schools and Afterschool Programs**  
[www.learningpt.org/afterschool/strength.pdf](http://www.learningpt.org/afterschool/strength.pdf). This guide examines comprehensive program planning to better integrate afterschool programming with the school day.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Priscilla Little** is an independent research and strategy consultant who has been working on issues related to effective afterschool and summer learning programs for over a decade. Her clients include national education research firms, state education agencies, not-for-profit agencies, and private foundations. She is currently working for The Wallace Foundation to support its afterschool system-building work, and with the U.S. Department of Education on a research study to investigate good and innovative practices in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs. The views represented in this article are solely her own and do not represent those of her clients.

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