Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Section 1:
A Focus on Student Success

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The Potential of Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers for Supporting School Success

It used to be simple: an elementary education in reading, writing, and arithmetic sufficed for the many; a secondary education sufficed for some; and a post-secondary education sufficed for the very few.

As a nation we began to see that this simple formula was inadequate. We have added the need for knowledge of science, technology, and the arts to our understanding of a basic education, along with the need for the 21st century skills of collaboration and creativity. We have also realized that everyone needs, and is entitled to, this basic education.

We have developed more sophisticated ideas about how to provide universal basic education. We now see the need to provide expanded learning opportunities for children and youth during afterschool hours and summers. We realize that home and community, as well as school, need to be part of a comprehensive plan for helping children and youth learn.

At the same time, we are learning a lot more about the key components that make these expanded learning opportunities work better and more effectively. The articles that follow provide concrete, detailed lessons from research and best practice about how to make afterschool and summer programming more effective in a number of key areas that help young people to be more successful in school and to graduate from high school—the first rung in the ladder leading to full participation in 21st century economic and civic life.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has kept pace since its initial authorization in 1994 by incorporating these understandings in its program guidelines (Penuel & McGhee, 2010). In its current form, the program is designed to provide opportunities for academic enrichment, youth development, and family learning (Harris, 2010). The program currently funds about 11,000 centers serving almost 1.7 million children and youth (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.).

In addition, in the decade before the Great Recession hit in 2008, there were efforts by some municipalities, foundations, United Ways, and school districts to provide resources to create and expand learning opportunities in the time after school and during weekends and summers. In the wake of the recession, the growth of this movement has slowed a bit, but there is an expanding chorus of voices calling for more engaged learning time, especially for struggling young people and those in low-income schools and neighborhoods.

With tight budgets, there is more interest in both improving quality and increasing access to expanded learning programs. While not all afterschool and summer programs have fully realized their potential to affect the lives of children and youth in the many ways suggested by the growing body of research in the field, the wealth of new information about what makes programs work well, as well as heightened interest in quality and access to programs, put us in a very positive place to make significant new advances.

The work done over the past decade by our two organizations— Foundations, Inc. and the Annie E. Casey Foundation— has taught us a few lessons about how thoughtful afterschool and summer experiences can make a difference in school success, especially in under-resourced communities and low-performing schools. The recommendations below suggest a few ways to maximize the potential that already resides in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and in similar local and state initiatives to promote school success.

- **Align in-school and out-of-school learning.** *Afterschool and summer learning programs can do what they do best—offering homework help and hands-on, fun activities—in service to the same standards and objectives that students are expected to meet during the school day. Alignment does not mean doing more of the same beyond the school day and year. It typically specifies arrangements to ensure regular, two-way communication and coordination between teachers and afterschool and summer program providers. Such coordination may take extra effort when 21st Century Learning Centers are located outside of school buildings (Penuel & McGhee, 2010), but it is nevertheless possible, and indeed necessary.*

- **Identify and respond to individual learning needs.** *A key aspect of alignment is focusing out-of-school-time activities on individual students' learning needs. Afterschool and summer programs can usually accommodate more intensive interventions for striving readers—interventions that give striving readers more learning time in more individualized settings outside of the school-day classroom—and can be especially effective in stemming summer learning loss. Providing interventions especially requires close coordination with school-day and school-year programs as to individual students' current academic needs, appropriate materials, and progress. The construction and sharing of individual success plans, to which all pertinent staff contribute, can greatly facilitate this kind of coordination (Foundations, Inc., 2011).*

- **Pay attention to health and school attendance.** *Physical and mental health issues can interfere with attendance and keep students from learning in school-day and out-of-school-time programs, but these problems are often overlooked. Afterschool and summer program staff can share information with other education professionals about students' possible health needs and assist in addressing chronic absenteeism. In this regard, the community-school collaboration that is central to the 21st Century Community Learning Centers should pay more attention to these health and attendance issues, and other school- or community-based initiatives to expand learning should add them to their agendas.*

- **Partner with families.** *Afterschool and summer program staff often have more opportunities than school-day staff to interact and develop positive relationships with families. Out-of-school-time staff can be a critical link between families and the school, not only communicating about school matters but also gathering information about students' interests, coordinating services, and connecting families to each other for support.*

- **Partner with community groups and organizations, and treat school, home, and community as a unified system.** *Children learn wherever they are. To be strategic in helping them get everything they need to succeed in school, the many "educators" in each child's life can join forces. Unlike any other major education initiative, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative requires school-community partnerships, family engagement, and more and varied engaged learning opportunities for young people. As a result, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative invites systems-thinking, in which school, afterschool, and summer-program providers, homes, and the community create a system of supports that takes each partner's unique contributions and makes them add up to an integrated whole that paves the way to school success. Leaders at all levels of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programming should be at the forefront of systems-thinking. It also makes sense for leaders in other afterschool and summer initiatives to incorporate this type of framework in their efforts to help children develop and learn.*

These ideas illustrate and provide additional insights and examples for getting the full power out of 21st Century Community Learning Centers and similar afterschool and summer learning initiatives.

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Expanded Learning Opportunities Are Key to Student Learning

All across the country, including my home state of Rhode Island, there is growing recognition that to remain competitive in the global marketplace, we must dramatically broaden our young people's academic skills and knowledge as well as the social and emotional capacity to use their skills and knowledge competently and compassionately. Indeed, our economic security, national security, and overall success as a democracy depend on our ability to educate our youth in ways that connect school learning to real-world experiences.

For over a decade, 21st Century Community Learning Centers have been providing a real-world context to learning and leading-edge learning opportunities in the afterschool hours and during the summer months. Strong, vibrant partnerships have been forged between schools and community agencies through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative to make learning relevant for students. In Rhode Island, these partnerships are playing a critical role in preparing our students for the workforce, college, careers, and success in life.

Last year I had the privilege of visiting the Chillin' and Skillin' Summer Program in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Chillin' and Skillin' is the summer component of the local school district's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, reaching over 100 third- to sixth-grade students in one of Woonsocket's most underserved neighborhoods. When I arrived for the visit, I expected to take the typical tour of various classrooms in the school building. Instead, I was taken to a local park where students were observing and identifying various bird species and predicting why they found so many species at that park, but nowhere else in the city. I then witnessed another group of students who were taking water samples at the Blackstone River to test for pollution. Rather than teaching only out of textbooks, Woonsocket teachers and their community partners

were making learning relevant for the students, and this hands-on learning allowed students to better understand the concepts explained during the school year. The strong partnership between the Woonsocket School Department and its nonprofit partner, Connecting for Children and Families, provided students with high quality, engaging summer programming that reduced summer learning loss and did all of this in a cost-effective way that made sense for all of the organizations involved.

Woonsocket has also been leading the way in offering high school graduation credits for opportunities taking place outside of the traditional school day. During my visit to Chillin' and Skillin', I also had the opportunity to visit RiverzEdge Arts Project. RiverzEdge and other community-based organizations in the city have been partnering with the high school to create the Woonsocket Expanded Learning Opportunities Initiative. This initiative is designed to provide multiple pathways to graduation for high school students by creating rigorous, individualized, standards-based, student-centered projects that engage teachers, community educators, and students in learning.

In one example of a high quality expanded learning opportunity, two students from Woonsocket High School partnered with an American history teacher and the local Museum of Work and Culture to produce an exhibit for the museum comparing and contrasting the immigrant experience from the late-19th century with the immigrant experience of today. The students researched primary and secondary sources, conducted interviews with current immigrants, learned about curating museum exhibits, and met all of the state's American history standards in order to receive course credit. This experience provided them with a real-world application of their knowledge, allowed them to utilize critical thinking and other life skills, and was made possible through the strong collaborative spirit that exists between Woonsocket schools and community partners such as Connecting for Children and Families, RiverzEdge Arts Project, and the Museum of Work and Culture.

The Chillin' and Skillin' program and the Woonsocket Expanded Learning Opportunities Initiative are just two of the many examples of the great results that we have seen from strong school-community partnerships in Rhode Island and across the nation through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Rhode Island currently has 21st Century Community Learning Centers in 56 schools, serving over 13,000 students after the school bell rings. These partnerships ensure that afterschool and summer learning programs reinforce school-day learning and strengthen understanding by making real-world connections for students.

Of vital significance to those of us responsible for the wise use of public resources, research shows that the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is working. Recent surveys conducted by the Rhode Island State Department of Education show that 66% of the teachers of all participating students reported improvement in homework completion and class participation. Moreover, 61% of these students' teachers reported improvements in student behavior. Additionally, a recent study by Public/Private Ventures found that due to the efforts of the Providence After School Alliance, participation in afterschool programming increased student attendance during the school day by 25% (RI Dept. of Education, 2010). For those who were highly engaged in afterschool programs, there were also improvements in math grades, math achievement

test scores, and social and emotional competencies (Kauh, 2011). All of these afterschool benefits positively affect how students perform during the school day while at the same time providing learning opportunities that expand our young people's skills, knowledge, and experiences to equip them to handle these rapidly changing times.

Of equal importance, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has led to greater collaboration between schools, cities, and community organizations, putting Rhode Island at the forefront of many national education improvement efforts. Chillin' and Skillin' and the Providence After School Alliance are wonderful examples of the many summer programs that are creating strong collaborations between schools and community organizations to reduce summer learning loss. Programs across the state have developed an innovative model in which school teachers and community educators cocreate and then codeliver a high quality, hands-on summer curriculum to students. These collaborations have strengthened relationships between schools, community organizations, and in some cases, city departments, and have led to further partnerships during the school year. In Providence, for example, the mayor and superintendent have become advocates and partners in the growth of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs to help drive a number of youth outcomes—academic, civic, creative, social, and emotional. In addition, an independent evaluation of this summer model by Brown University found it to be replicable in other communities (Laorenza & Whitney, 2010).

21st Century Community Learning Centers collaborations have also resulted in partnerships that have increased the number of pathways that students in Rhode Island have for high school graduation. For the last several years, teams from Woonsocket, Central Falls, and Providence have been working to develop a system in which students receive high school credit for rigorous, student-centered, individualized learning opportunities that occur outside of the traditional school. These learning opportunities require extensive collaboration and coordination between teachers and community organizations, and they are achieving success. In Central Falls, for instance, students who had dropped out of high school have re-enrolled and are currently working toward their diplomas, drawing heavily on these programs. In many cases, these learning opportunities are more rigorous than a traditional class; moreover, they provide students with real-world context for the concepts they are learning.

It is clear that these school-community partnerships benefit student learning and growth and therefore make sense from an educational standpoint. In these trying economic times, these partnerships also make financial sense, often saving school districts and community organizations money. For school districts, partnering with community organizations allows them to provide a service, whether it is a summer program or an afterschool tutoring program, at a fraction of the cost of expanding the school day. In many cases, schools provide in-kind support, such as keeping a building open later or shifting bus schedules to allow for a late bus; in return, students are provided additional academic enrichment. For community organizations, these partnerships allow them to achieve their mission and goals and often provide them with space and resources that they would not otherwise have. Put simply, partnerships make sound financial sense for all parties and, most importantly, they provide students with additional learning opportunities and social and emotional supports after the school bell rings, generating demonstrable results.

When I think about education improvements, I find it implies that something we have tried is not working and that we must continue looking far and wide for the "silver bullet" that will solve the problem. I believe that such an effort is ultimately misdirected. Indeed, when I think about the tools our schools require to adequately prepare our children for a global economy, I look no further than the neighborhoods in which those schools are located. Every school is situated in a neighborhood with a set of community resources and organizations that interact with children every day and provide relevant connections to real-world experiences and future career pathways. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative is proof that strong partnerships between schools and community organizations can lead to solid improvements in learning and significant benefits to children, families, and communities.

To generate the improvements we seek in student achievement, we must remember that learning does not end when the school bell rings and that there are many ways to learn and many ways to teach. School-community partnerships offer a way to ensure that children's learning and personal development does not end when the school day does. Indeed, experiential, inquiry-based learning is reinforced and addressed in new and unique ways in the hours after school and during the summer months. As policy makers, we must strengthen our support of these partnerships. In doing so we will be strengthening our support of our children's academic growth and will ensure that our country remains the leader of the global marketplace.

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Supporting Mathematics Learning in Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

It is late afternoon, and fifth- and sixth-grade students at Intermediate School 125 in Woodside, New York, are beating on plastic buckets and hand drums to create fun rhythmic sounds. However, that is not all they are doing. Their afterschool instructor is also helping them apply and reinforce key mathematics concepts—such as counting, fractions, multiplication, and division—as they keep track of measures to perform percussion routines.

Why do programs, such as the Champions Club After School Program at Intermediate School 125, choose to embed mathematics into their activities? In light of today's strenuous school accountability demands, widespread concern about our nation's ability to compete globally, and high drop-out rates (including disproportionate rates for low-income and minority students), afterschool programs often provide mathematics learning opportunities to support the academic needs of struggling students.

In adding a mathematics component to their core set of activities, programs operating after school and in summer typically have one or more of the following goals in mind:

- *Schools and communities turn to these programs as a resource <u>to raise overall student performance and narrow the achievement gap</u> between high- and low-performing students by providing more individualized learning time through tutoring and other targeted interventions.*

- *Some programs include a mathematics focus to reinforce learning—helping students solidify understandings they develop during the regular school day by engaging with content through different learning modes (e.g., hands-on, interdisciplinary, cross-age, real-world) and during periods when school is not in session, such as the critical summer months when students may be at risk of losing learning gained during the school year.*

- *Finally, some programs incorporate mathematics instruction to accelerate learning, helping students build academic background knowledge they can draw upon as they learn new content in the regular classroom setting.*

Programs typically use a combination of more targeted learning experiences (e.g., direct instruction, tutoring) and enrichment experiences to meet one or more of these purposes.

But do afterschool programs that incorporate a mathematics focus actually lead to improved student outcomes? Early study findings were mixed, and the body of research in this area is still relatively small; however, in recent years a growing number of program evaluations have indicated that participating in well-designed and implemented programs can enhance mathematics test scores and grades, school attendance, and student engagement in learning. Moreover, successful programs tend to have the most significant effects for students most at risk of failing in core subjects, such as math and reading, or dropping out of school (Afterschool Alliance, 2011; Little, 2009).

For the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Services (IES) panel recommendations, see *Structuring Out-of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement* (2009), available at the IES website: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/practiceguide.aspx?sid=10

For a robust set of resources to support implementation of the IES recommendations, see the U.S. Department of Education's website Doing What Works: http://dww.ed.gov/Increased-Learning-Time/topic/index.cfm?T_ID=29

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of schools, districts, and community-based organizations running afterschool and summer learning programs with the goal of improving academic performance (Stonehill et al., 2009). To respond to these programs' need for research-based guidance, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) convened an expert panel to review existing research on afterschool, summer, weekend, and tutoring programs (Beckett et al., 2009). The panel generated five recommendations for designing, delivering, and evaluating high quality academically oriented programs:

1. Align the out of school time program academically with the school day.

2. Maximize student participation and attendance.

3. Adapt instruction to individual and small-group needs.

4. Provide engaging learning experiences.

5. Assess program performance and use the results to improve the quality of the program.

The following is a discussion of the recommendations as they relate to designing and delivering high quality programs with a mathematics emphasis.

Designing Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs That Address Mathematics

Designing high quality afterschool and summer learning programs with a focus on mathematics requires aligning the program academically without repeating the school day, while maximizing student participation.

To facilitate the communication and collaboration needed to align the program academically with the school day, while maintaining a distinctive programmatic identity and approach, it is important to designate a point of contact for both the out-of-school and regular school-day program. The afterschool program coordinator, who ideally has access to and presence in the school building during day, develops relationships and maintains ongoing communication with regular school day staff. The school staff person designated to coordinate with the out-of-school-time program provides the afterschool coordinator with student data, curriculum materials, and any other information that assists with aligning the program with the school's academic goals and priorities.

Additionally, the afterschool and school coordinators might identify opportunities for collaborative planning and professional development. Finally, they can work together to determine how to strategically use the school's teaching faculty and community-based and business partners to support the program in engaging, hands-on, and personalized ways. Teachers can be recruited to serve as tutors or intervention specialists, mentor new out-of-school-time staff, model instructional strategies, and collaboratively plan enrichment activities to include the mathematics concepts and skills for which students need the most support. Community organizations and business partners can serve as tutors and mentors, help plan and facilitate real-life and practical math problem solving activities, and demonstrate how math and math "talk" are critical in the work world.

Ensuring that the afterschool program aligns with the school day is an important strategy, but alignment alone is insufficient for improving mathematics performance if the students who need the program the most do not take advantage of it. To help maximize student attendance and participation, schools should promote the programs widely using a variety of communication mechanisms; address the needs and preferences of students and parents, including issues of transportation, location, hours of operation, and programmatic interests; and offer enrichment and recreational activities in addition to mathematics instruction.

> Designing high quality afterschool and summer learning programs with a focus on mathematics requires aligning the program academically without repeating the school day.

Ohio

Glover Community Learning Center's Akron After School Program is aligned to the regular school day mathematics curriculum, uses intervention assistance teams to identify struggling students for participation, provides targeted math and reading interventions, and maximizes attendance by allowing students to choose from among a variety of engaging enrichment classes where they enhance their mathematics and other subject-area knowledge through project-based learning. The afterschool program coordinator plays a critical role in ensuring alignment with the school day and uses regular updates about student needs from school-day teachers to tailor afterschool instructional activities. For example, conversations with different teachers led to a priority focus of supporting fifth-grade students with solving math story problems. To further enhance alignment, school-day and afterschool instructors are provided collaboration time to exchange ideas and information about students. All afterschool instructors are encouraged to participate in professional development sessions with school-day teachers, and many school-day teachers serve as afterschool instructors.

Providing Tailored and Engaging Afterschool and Summer Mathematics Learning Experiences

Recommendations 3 and 4 from the IES panel (above) focus specifically on instructional delivery. Programs should provide targeted, intentionally designed learning experiences that are engaging, active, and maximize the flexibility that out-of-school environments offer to meet specific learning needs. The IES panel did not generate content-specific instructional recommendations. Another project, however, previously funded by the U.S.

Afterschool Programs Multiply Math Skills

A Peace Corps water project in Panama receives virtual assistance from an unlikely source: an afterschool program in rural Washington State. Meanwhile, afterschool program participants elsewhere in Washington are learning to build bridges, engineer wind farms, and design robots.

The Northwest Learning and Achievement Group (NLA), which directs these programs, has been highly successful in utilizing the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. Each afternoon session begins with tutoring and supervised homework time with math teachers then moves to online math tutorials and interactive group projects. Perhaps surprisingly, organizers have cut back on the afterschool time dedicated to homework in part because they found that providing students more innovative outlets to hone their math skills had a larger positive impact on test scores.

In addition to working with a Peace Corps volunteer, NLA programs utilize community resources, including arts and cultural organizations, city and local governments, environmental programs, and parks and recreation departments. Today, more than 2,000 students attend NLA afterschool programs, 80% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Through quality afterschool programs, these students are expanding their horizons while demonstrating impressive gains in their classroom behavior, homework completion, and standardized test scores.

Department of Education—the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning—identifies promising practices for a variety of content areas, including mathematics, as part of a multiyear study of 21st Century Community Learning Centers-funded programs showing gains in student achievement (National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning, n.d.). The recommended mathematics practices include the following:

1. Finding Math – use of engaging, everyday situations to bring math to life

2. Math Centers – small-group stations that allow students to work independently or collaboratively on problem-solving tasks at their own pace

3. Math Games – fun activities that develop targeted math strategies and skills

4. Math Projects – learning experiences that extend beyond one lesson that allow students to deepen mathematical knowledge and skills through their own authentic investigations

5. Math Tools – use of pictures, rulers, symbols, technology, and concrete materials to problem solve

6. Math Tutoring – one-on-one or small-group work on specific math skills

7. Family Connections – methods for engaging family and community support and enthusiasm for math in out-of-school time

> Math talk helps students clarify their thinking, construct meaning, and develop reasoning skills while providing afterschool and summer learning facilitators with informal assessment data they can use to make instructional adjustments and provide targeted feedback.

The project team identified three overarching strategies that should accompany implementation of any of these practices to increase the level of rigor and student engagement with these learning experiences. First, afterschool and summer learning programs should encourage problem solving by providing students opportunities to creatively generate strategies for solving intriguing mathematics problems on their own. Second, program activities should be designed to develop and support math talk by providing ample opportunities for students to communicate ideas to each other. Math talk helps students clarify their thinking, construct meaning, and develop reasoning skills while providing afterschool and summer learning facilitators with informal assessment data they can use to make instructional adjustments and provide targeted feedback. Finally, activities should emphasize students working together to draw on each others' knowledge and deepen learning.

These crosscutting strategies for supporting afterschool and summer mathematics learning align nicely with several of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for mathematics. Almost all states have adopted these or similarly rigorous learning goals designed to prepare students to succeed in college and the workforce. The CCSS articulate expectations for math content in addition to mathematical practices, or "habits of mind," such as making sense of and persevering in solving problems, reasoning abstractly and quantitatively, and constructing viable arguments. With the relative flexibility afterschool and summer programs have with time and structuring activities, they can be perfect environments for fostering these mathematics habits of mind and an invaluable resource as schools and districts plan for transitioning to the CCSS.

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Texas

The afterschool program staff at Purple Sage Elementary School in Houston, Texas, are in ongoing communication with classroom teachers to identify the mathematical concepts they should reinforce through engaging experiences that are different than the school day. At times they focus directly on these concepts. For example, they might have students choose from a variety of center-based math games where one small group of students works to deepen their understanding of and practice applying the concept of equivalent fractions using fraction dominos. Instructors emphasize critical thinking skills through high-level, open-ended questioning, encouraging students to connect math concepts to other familiar ideas and find creative solutions to problems. During other times, mathematics learning is intentionally embedded into other engaging activities, such as incorporating the application of a variety of basic mathematics concepts (e.g., odd and even numbers, factors, multiples) into a competitive group tag activity.

For video clips of Purple Sage Elementary School staff members using the recommended practices of Math Centers and Math Games, see the National Center for Quality Afterschool: http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/math/pr_math_centers.html

http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/math/pr_math_games.html

Opportunities for Improving Mathematics Achievement

Afterschool and summer learning programs not only provide additional time but also different modes for supporting, reinforcing, and even accelerating mathematics learning. Communication, collaboration, and coordination between what happens during the school day and what happens in the afterschool or summer learning environment are all critical elements for ensuring successful program outcomes.

In addition, leaders of afterschool and summer learning programs and their regular school day partners who want to enhance math learning and interest should:

- intentionally infuse mathematics content into everyday problems by using math games and centers, incorporating the use of math tools, and constructing authentic project-based learning opportunities;

- provide targeted tutoring assistance; and

- engage families, communities, and businesses to expand students' mathematics learning opportunities through meaningful partnerships.

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How Quality Afterschool Programs Help Motivate and Engage More Young People in Learning, Schooling, and Life

As we move into the second decade of the 21st century, knowledge in all fields has expanded and yielded developments far beyond the imagined world of science fiction writers just 20 years ago—consider, for example, the iPhone and iPad, tablet computers, and the Android operating system. Even more amazing is the *access* that these and other devices allow to the vast amount of information and knowledge that exists today, as well as the *rapidity* with which that information and knowledge will continue to expand in the near future.

In this context, *how* we learn, especially as young people, matters. While children cannot possibly hope to acquire more than a fraction of the sum total of human knowledge, they should be involved in experiences that are most likely to help them learn and benefit from our extensive and ever-expanding knowledge base.

Background Research

New insights from cognitive and neuroscience research into how children acquire knowledge should be inspiring dramatic new strategies and structures for learning in schools and other educational settings—unfortunately, this is often not the case. There are glimmers of hope, however, in the afterschool arena, especially in conjunction with efforts undertaken in the last decade through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Today, there are great examples of these insights that are being incorporated into afterschool practice, enhancing student engagement and creating the conditions that will lead to a greater likelihood that students will stay in school and graduate on time (Mahoney, Parente, & Lord, 2007; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Research on Learning

Unlike earlier views of individual capacity—"some have it, some do not"—current research suggests a continuously learning mind, one that is plastic and adaptive into late adulthood and that has enormous capacity for storing memories and knowledge, unless serious brain damage has occurred. Even then, the brain's plasticity asserts itself, as the heroic Gabrielle Giffords has demonstrated so well (Sacks, 2010).

Because individuals are learning continuously from infancy, they acquire insights about themselves and the world around them that influences the way they make sense of their daily interactions and the circumstances they confront. Moreover, prior knowledge forms the foundation for any new learning.

Recent research about learning has also identified intellectual curiosity and interest as essential for learning and intellectual development. Interest and curiosity are the basis for motivating the "hungry mind" (Stumm, Hell, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011). The more a student exhibits curiosity, which is rooted in interest, the more he or she can focus on, bring effort to, and engage in meaningful tasks. This aspect of learning, while underutilized in many educational settings, has great potential and has been incorporated into quality afterschool and youth development programs.

Additionally, research also illuminates the importance of caring social relationships and the contributions that those relationships make to learning (Shonkoff & Philips, 2000). Human beings exist in a world with other people. They are "hardwired to connect" (Commission on Children at Risk, 2003). Meaningful relationships with others matter to children, youth, and adults and to their learning.

The research on belonging in educational contexts is relatively new, and the direction of causality has not been definitively established. Nevertheless, many correlational studies have shown that students who report caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school have more positive academic attitudes and values and are more satisfied with school. They are also more engaged in academic work, and they attend school more and learn more (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

This means that children and the adults with whom children interact in educational settings must have and avail themselves of opportunities to demonstrate that they care about each other in meaningful ways. In that process, children can more easily take risks, explore, express themselves, and learn.

Research on Afterschool and Summer Learning

The general trends in the research literature about quality youth development, afterschool, and summer learning programs show the relationship between the reported engagement and motivation of children and youth and positive outcomes like school and program attendance and positive academic gains in reading and math, even when attendance is low (Hirsch, Mekinds, & Stawicki, 2010).

These general trends in the research literature about the positive consequences of quality afterschool and youth development programs are nicely summed up by the National Research Council's report *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (2002). That volume expounds on the important qualities of educational activities that will likely engage children and youth in their learning, such as active construction of

knowledge; disciplined inquiry; relevance of material being studied to the student and his or her community culture; regular feedback on progress; opportunities to rethink work and understanding; recognition of and use of students' knowledge, interests, and dispositions; and students working together and tutoring each other. Children will be more likely to work well with each other and with their teachers when the adults demonstrate care and high regard for them.

In their meta-analysis of the research literature about afterschool, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) found that "… participants demonstrated significant increases in their self-perceptions and bonding to school, positive social behaviors, school grades and levels of academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviors." Moreover, "there were significant increases in youths' self-perceptions, bonding to school, positive social behaviors, school grades, and achievement test scores. Significant reductions also appeared for problem behaviors."

This and other research suggests that when designing afterschool and summer learning programs, community and education leaders must understand that disaffected and underserved children and youth will only attend noncompulsory educational programs if the program fosters high student engagement—that is, if students remain active, stay focused, and experience enjoyment throughout their participation in the program (Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, & Baker, 2000; Shernoff, 2010; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Students' engagement requires developing program designs and activities that, at least in the minds of students, stands in stark contrast to the experiences of boredom, distraction, and apathy that typically characterizes their experiences with conventional academic tasks and/or settings (Mahoney et al., 2007). As a consequence, much of the design effort undertaken by program leaders should focus on creating and fostering highly engaging social settings/environments that will maintain student attendance and participation with the program each day.

Support for Practice That Works

Many of these research findings have influenced one of the most important funding streams in this country developed to create vibrant learning environments for children after school: the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Through the funding requirements of this federal program, public schools partner with community-based organizations to create programs designed to connect students to their homes, schools, and communities. These programs have had more independence, leverage, and flexibility within school systems than most categorical programs had ever experienced before in the history of public education. High quality 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs emphasize creativity, crusade for fresh ideas, continuously energize and motivate staff, and combat any tendency toward bureaucratization.

LA's BEST, like a number of other high quality programs, welcomes the responsibility for training what is primarily a young staff with limited background knowledge and experience in working with children. Most staff members reside within 2 miles of the schools in which they work, and collectively they more closely reflect the ethnicity and daily experiences of the children who are enrolled in the program. LA's BEST works

to build a common understanding and common language about how children learn and what motivates them to learn. This helps create the kinds of learning environments that promote engagement and support the development of trusting, meaningful relationships.

Unlike the regular school-day program, based on predetermined curricula developed by those living far away from the neighborhoods served, programming in LA's BEST is developed at each site, starting with a focus on the students and their interests. Activities in program areas of enrichment, recreation, and nutrition are created based on the interests, curiosities, and even fears of the students. At the same time, the program at each site also complements and expands skills in literacy and numeracy that, in turn, support learning during the regular school day.

Distinctive youth development values are infused within the program culture at LA's BEST. All staff are encouraged and expected to embrace the principle "Nothing we do is more important than the effect it has on the child." Afterschool programs like LA's BEST have the luxury, for example, of not having to be on page 10 of any textbook by Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. If a planned activity does not have the respectful engagement of students, staff members are expected to change the activity. LA's BEST staff members at each site receive training to deliver engaging learning activities and to "monitor and adjust" as needed. Each site is assigned two itinerant support staff, who conduct frequent site visits to monitor program implementation. These traveling staff members also assist staff in achieving activity performance goals through the steps of *inquiry, observation, assessment, debriefing,* and *planning.* Traveling staff, generally more experienced than site-based staff, communicate clear, concise, and observable indicators of high quality practices at each step. Additionally, consistent collaboration and communication by site staff with principals, teachers, and other regular school-day personnel promote tighter alignment of program efforts in support of enhanced student learning.

Additionally, LA's BEST works annually with more than 100 community-based organizations to respond to children's interests and needs by providing opportunities to engage in seasonal sports and games, experience the visual and performing arts, participate in science and math activities, learn how to use new technologies, and acquire information about ways to improve health and nutrition.

The LA's BEST program is a clear and compelling example of a program that reflects quality engagement features. There are other programs that, similarly, have developed and enacted programs to engage youth deeply and meaningfully. Robert Halpern (2009) describes several apprenticeship programs involving young people in various settings, such as schools; youth-serving organizations; and arts, civic, and other cultural institutions. In these programs youth engage in meaningful "real world" activities related to the professional, artistic, and civic work that reflect their career interests. In such an "apprentice-like" relationship, the young person interacts with and learns alongside the adult, who has expertise in the particular area of interest. The student gains knowledge, skills, and habits of mind from the planned activities, social interaction, and performances undertaken with the adult(s).

In his Presidential Address at the Meetings of the Society for Research on Adolescence in 2010, Reed Larson describes a number of youth-serving programs involved in a study he is conducting. Each of these programs seeks meaningful engagement of youth in consequential efforts in which they can make a difference in their own lives and in their community. Larson shares the reflections of one student about the events: "I wasn't super interested. . . [but when] I found out a lot of stuff about the schools, what they were doing, I was like 'Hey, that's wrong!' because that [had] happened to me." He then described becoming "really into it, really psyched" (Larson, 2011, p. 325).

Evidence of Success for LA's BEST

Through its long-time collaboration with UCLA's National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST), LA's BEST has more independent, longitudinal evaluation data and anecdotal results than any program of its kind in the country. Research has found, for example, that students in LA's BEST are 20% less likely to drop out of school than students who do not participate in the program (Huang, Kim, Marshall, & Perez, 2005). LA's BEST students are also 30% less likely to commit juvenile crime compared to peers not in the program (Goldschmidt, Huang, & Chinen, 2007).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Successful afterschool and summer programs should incorporate the following principles:

1. Young people should be actively encouraged to share what is real to them.

2. High quality, effective programs should work to forge strong connections between students and staff, reinforce connections between new knowledge and old, and strengthen connections between what a child already knows how to do and what he or she would like to learn.

3. These programs should support the strengthening of life skills, such as resourcefulness, grit, and resiliency that are critical to a child's whole development.

Ultimately, this site-based, personalized approach to children's learning and engagement after school will generate positive outcomes that are observed not only within the context of the afterschool program itself but during the regular school day as well.

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The Potential of Career and College Readiness and Exploration in Afterschool Programs

A high school diploma used to be enough to get by in the job market, but this is no longer the case. A Georgetown University study found that the percentage of jobs in the United States that require some form of postsecondary education will reach a projected 63% by 2018, up from 28% in the early 1970s (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). This trend is being driven by the increasingly complex global labor market that requires more advanced levels of math, science, and language arts proficiency.

Tony Wagner from Harvard University argues that in addition to higher levels of basic skills, students need certain 21st century skills for success in a knowledge economy, such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, adaptability, imagination, and entrepreneurism. Yet he laments that these skills are noticeably underemphasized in instruction and assessments within American schools and that youth have few opportunities to develop such skills in school settings (Wagner, 2010).

High schools are increasingly focused on ramping up student performance in basic academic skills—certainly a laudable goal. Many schools are not able, however, to provide opportunities during the school day for all students to learn about college and career options or to develop vital 21st century skills. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds can more easily access learning opportunities through networks of family, friends, and other options, but economically disadvantaged youth often have little access to these opportunities and services. Many business and civic groups were pleased when President Obama announced a national goal of having the largest share of college graduates in the world by 2020; consequently, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that all young people are prepared for success, in both college and careers. Afterschool and summer learning programs can help us meet this goal.

Many afterschool and summer learning programs expose youth to the importance of college by taking them on visits to college campuses, working with students and families to identify prospective colleges, providing assistance in the college application process, helping families navigate the financial assistance jungle, and providing encouragement and support to students who do not see themselves as college material. These activities, which many high schools do not have the time and resources to provide, are key to helping students become college ready and make a successful transition into college (Bowles & Brand, 2009; College Track, 2012b; Herrera, Linden, Arbreton, & Grossman, 2011; Seftor, Mamun, & Schirm, 2009) .

Other afterschool and summer learning programs provide youth with opportunities to learn about careers, participate in internships or work experiences, participate in community service projects, or earn stipends for work. Employers are often key partners with afterschool programs in providing work-based learning or apprenticeship-type experiences. These activities are important for youth who have little exposure to careers or who are unfamiliar with the workplace, again, since activities of this nature are rarely scheduled into the regular school day (Afterschol Alliance, 2009; Bowles & Brand, 2009; Halpern, 2008; Hirsch, Hedges, Stawicki, & Mekinda, 2011; Moran, n.d.; Pearson & Fabiano, 2006).

Afterschool and summer learning programs also provide engaging learning opportunities for youth by connecting learning to careers, college, and other future plans. In many classrooms, students do not learn how to apply their knowledge (Casner-Lotto, 2006). They learn content from a theoretical standpoint, divorced from the real world and rarely placed in the context of how the information or knowledge can be used to solve actual problems. In contrast, many afterschool and summer learning programs excel in providing opportunities for youth to develop these types of skills and abilities by encouraging them to work in teams, design and implement complex projects rooted in real-world challenges, undertake community service, and serve in internships or apprenticeships (Afterschool Alliance, 2009; Bruschi & Clewell, 2008; Chi, Snow, Goldstein, Lee, & Chung, 2010).

The evidence base strongly supports deploying afterschool and summer programs and partnerships to develop students' readiness skills for enrolling in post-secondary education and for joining the workforce; yet many education, community, and higher education leaders have not taken the necessary steps to tap the significant potential of such a strategy. The specific examples shown below clearly demonstrate what is possible in real-life situations and communities.

Examples That Show What Is Possible

What follows are descriptions of several exemplary afterschool and summer learning programs that provide youth with opportunities to learn about postsecondary education and careers and develop employability skills. The programs profiled below include Upward Bound Math-Science, Citizens Schools, and Project Exploration.

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Upward Bound Math-Science

Upward Bound Math-Science is a college access program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education TRIO program, that has an afterschool and summer component. The program was designed to provide disadvantaged high school students with skills and experiences that prepare them for success in a 4-year college and help them succeed in a math or science career field. Grants are given to 2- and 4-year colleges and universities to provide programs during the school year and summer. School-year programs include supplemental academic instruction and enrichment activities such as faculty-assisted experiments, seminars with outside speakers, and field trips. The 6-week summer program includes an intensive focus on math and science instruction and exposure to life in college, including residency in college dorms. All programs include activities such as preparation for college entrance exams, information on postsecondary opportunities, and assistance completing college applications and understanding financial aid opportunities. A 2007 evaluation of Upward Bound Math-Science showed improved high school grades in math and science among participants and a greater likelihood of majoring in math or science and completing a 4-year degree in math or science (Olsen et al., 2007). The latest evaluation showed that all participants benefited from an increased likelihood of earning a postsecondary certificate or license. Among participants with the lowest initial educational expectations, it found an increased likelihood of receiving Advanced Placement honors, or core academic credits in high school and greater chances of enrolling in and completing some type of postsecondary program (Seftor et al., 2009).

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Citizen Schools

Citizen Schools, funded in part with 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds and based in Boston, partners with public middle schools to provide structured expanded learning opportunities for educational enrichment, career exposure, and high school and college preparation to students in grades 6–8 during and after school. The program incorporates academic support, apprenticeships with adult volunteers in a variety of fields, and a community explorations curriculum that brings the community into the classroom and the classroom to the community. Students participate in experiential learning projects, referred to as apprenticeships. These learning experiences are led by volunteer community members and employers, who set goals, focus on academic support, and teach leadership skills. Students build 21st century skills, such as communication, collaboration, data analysis, effective reasoning, and problem solving, and they create and present a final product to share what they have learned with families, teachers, public officials, community members, and business leaders. Citizen Schools also takes eighth graders on college visits, where students visit classes, attend social events, and engage in other guided activities that provide a concrete awareness of college life. An evaluation of Citizen Schools found increased

levels of student engagement and achievement, higher attendance and course pass rates, lower suspension rates, a positive impact on English and math course grades, and an increased propensity to select a rigorous high school (Pearson & Fabiano, 2006).

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Project Exploration

Project Exploration is a nonprofit organization that provides science education to underrepresented groups, particularly females and minorities. The Project provides over 300 Chicago Public School youth access to free afterschool and summer science programs that spark an interest in science, motivate youth to pursue science-related careers, and ensure that they are equipped for such careers. Participants benefit from hands-on programming, authentic fieldwork, leadership development, and long-term relationships with educators through ongoing mentorships. Programs include a 3-week summer fieldwork immersion program where participants take classes on anatomy, geology, and paleontology and conclude with a week-long paleontology field expedition. Students also can fulfill high school community service graduation requirements by serving as docents for science exhibits at local museums. Project Exploration also offers science programs for girls where science exploration is combined with leadership development through hands-on science activities and interactions with female science role models. A 10-year retrospective review found that Project Exploration participants benefited from higher high school graduation rates, higher 4-year college enrollment and completion rates, a greater likelihood of majoring in a science field, and greater employment rates in science-related professions. The study also found that participants had an increased science capacity and that meaningful engagement in a community of practice with strong relationships supported peer learning and helped students envision careers in science (Chi et al., 2010).

These afterschool and summer learning programs help young people think about their futures, learn some of the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education and the workplace, and draw connections between classroom learning and the real world through structured learning experiences. All of them rely on strong partnerships among schools, community-based organizations, colleges, and/or employers that enhance and strengthen their programs. These partnerships also help youth connect with caring adults who can provide advice and support about career and college pathways.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Afterschool and summer learning programs can and should help youth be prepared for college and careers, but many do not explicitly include it as an emphasis. Here are some recommendations along with examples of programs addressing the issues.

First, afterschool and summer learning programs can intentionally focus on helping youth explore, set goals, and prepare for postsecondary education. One program that helps youth explore and prepare for postsecondary education is College Track, a national nonprofit that partners with high schools and local community-based organizations and offers college preparatory activities to almost 1,200 underserved youth afterschool and during the summer. Activities include college tours, academic advising, enrichment workshops, ACT and SAT preparation, summer writing institutes focused on the college application process, and guidance on college entrance and financial aid (College Track, 2012a).

Second, programs can create partnerships with employers to help youth learn about and experience careers first-hand through work-based learning, apprenticeships, or internships. The Youth Astronomy Apprenticeship Program, through collaboration between the MIT Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space Research, the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, the Timothy Smith Network, and local afterschool providers in the Boston area, fosters science learning among urban teenage high school students and prepares them for professional competitive opportunities. In the program, equal effort is put into pursuing science learning for academic enrichment and in stressing the link between employable skills and the skills developed in science and other professional fields. During the summer apprenticeship program, youth participate in paid positions, working with scientists and science educators from MIT and Harvard. An evaluation showed that youth who participated in these programs increased their commitment to science and demonstrated improved leadership and a greater understanding of astronomy and scientific concepts (Norland, Foutz, & Krabill, 2009).

Third, programs can develop engaging, relevant, and age-appropriate programming for youth that connects their academic studies with hands-on, project-based, experiential, and collaborative work, set in the context of real-world challenges. The Build San Francisco Institute, a partnership between San Francisco Unified School District, the nonprofit Architectural Foundation of San Francisco, and several business and community partners, began 15 years ago as a 6-week summer mentorship program for students interested in design, construction, architecture, and engineering. This collaboration then grew into an integral partnership with San Francisco Unified School District that offers a half-day high school program, complete with fully accredited courses in architectural design and urban studies, mentorships with two dozen major San Francisco firms and civic agencies, and up to 15 units of high school credit (approved for CA State University admission) per semester (Architectural Foundation of San Francisco, n.d.).

Fourth, programs can ensure that youth have opportunities to develop 21st century skills. In New York City and Washington, DC, Global Kids focuses on digital literacy and civic participation through in-school, out-of-school, and online work so that youth can succeed in school, participate effectively in the democratic process, and achieve leadership in their communities and on the global stage. The nonprofit program receives funds from and partners with several corporations, foundations, and government institutions. Thousands of students study global issues, develop local connections, and work in peer education, social action, digital media, and service-learning. Through its various activities, Global Kids has an explicit focus on engaging students in 21st century skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication (Global Kids, n.d.).

These recommendations and examples make clear that afterschool and summer learning programs can develop strong partnerships with K–16 education institutions, employers, museums, and community-based and youth-serving organizations in order to create stronger connections to college and careers. Given their prevalence in communities across the country and their ability to be flexible and responsive to community needs, afterschool and summer learning programs are well positioned to provide youth, particularly underserved youth, with opportunities to be college and career ready. If America is going to be more competitive in the future, we need to capitalize more aggressively on these opportunities.

For More Information

For Tony Wagner's recommendations on essential skills that are currently needed in classrooms see: http://www.tonywagner.com/resources/rigor-redefined

For more information on Upward Bound Math-Science see http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomathsci/index.html

For information on how Citizen Schools aligns resources among multiple partners see http://www.citizenschools.org/school-partners/expectations/

For information on Project Exploration's youth programs, resources, and links to various projects see http://www.projectexploration.org/programs.htm

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Using Afterschool and Summer Learning to Improve Literacy Skills

America's literacy rates remain a national challenge, and fourth grade reading scores tell the story. An analysis of 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fourth grade reading scores reveals that two-thirds of fourth graders are not "proficient" readers, including 36% who scored *below* "basic." Disaggregating the data sheds light on more disturbing findings: 58% of African Americans, 54% of Hispanics, and 52% of American Indian/Alaska Natives scored below "basic." For low-income children, *more than four out of every five scored less than "proficient,"* including 54% who scored below "basic" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Children who do not become proficient readers by fourth grade are on a trajectory for a wide array of negative consequences in school and in later life. According to the National Research Council (1998), "academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy based on third grade reading skills." Researchers at Yale University recently concluded that three-quarters of the students who are poor readers in third grade remain poor readers in high school and are far more likely to drop out than their peers (Shaywitz et al., 1997).

The root causes of the literacy crisis in the United States are well documented and multifaceted. A number of studies underscore that reading success—or failure—starts at home. By age 3, children from low-income families have a listening vocabulary only one-third the size of their more affluent peers (Afterschool Alliance, 2011), and they have significantly less access to print. Neuman (2009) found that there was only one book title for every 300 children in low-income neighborhoods. With less access to high

quality early care and pre-kindergarten programs, these children may hear as many as 30-million fewer words than do their middle-income peers before reaching kindergarten, impeding such important precursors to literacy as vocabulary acquisition and language development.

In addition, many low-income students miss too much instructional time as a result of chronic absenteeism in the early grades. As many as 25% of low-income students in urban school districts are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade (Chang & Romero, 2008). When the school year ends, low-income students experience significant learning losses during the summer (See Heyns, 1978; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Luftig, 2003). Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse (1996), for example, found that, on average, low-income students lose more than 2 months of reading performance every summer during their elementary school years.

However, most children—even the most vulnerable—can achieve the benchmark of reading proficiency by the end of third grade. Recent research delineates how people learn to read and provides best practices for teaching reading, via decades of work from the National Institute for Child Health and Development, the National Reading Panel, and others. Mounting evidence suggests that *afterschool and summer learning programs can play a vital role* in improving literacy outcomes for children. Reading enrichment, tutoring, and social-emotional development programs, combined with parent involvement and books and materials of high quality, are producing results that close achievement gaps (Storch & Whitehurst, 2001; Kim & White, 2008; Wilkins et al., 2012).

The Promise of Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

One example of a successful summer learning program that has demonstrated significant improvement in reading achievement is Summer Advantage USA (www.summeradvantage.org). One of only two scientifically validated summer learning programs in the nation, this 5-week program combines rigorous morning academics with engaging afternoon enrichment activities. Since its inception in 2009, the program has served over 10,000 youth nationwide and has been offered by a number of 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs across several states. Youth (dubbed "scholars") who participate in the Summer Advantage program experience over *2 months of growth in reading skills,* as well as 2 months in math skills.

Summer Advantage attributes its consistent literacy gains to several key programmatic elements that support the literacy development of its scholars: (1) hiring exceptional educators and offering small-group ratios; (2) providing 2 hours of reading and writing instruction each morning, Monday through Thursday; (3) using a rigorous, research-based curriculum; (4) incorporating a multicultural leveled library into each classroom that speaks to the real interests of the scholars; and (5) providing pre-program professional development for program staff that focuses on child development and constructing engaging instruction. These program characteristics—sustained time, access to appropriate print, scaffolded materials, and staff development—are found in similar programs that result in reading gains (e.g., Kim & White, 2008; Wilkins et al., 2012).

Of course, unlike Summer Advantage, many summer and afterschool programs are not explicitly designed to "teach" reading as such; therefore, they may not typically have personnel and/or the expertise to take on such a task. Appropriate interventions can, however, still be effectively used by program staff to help students maintain or enhance their reading skills. The key is to design the *right kind* of summer and afterschool programs as delineated by research. Afterschool and summer learning programs can, in fact, easily infuse reading into activities that children and youth enjoy. So, in addition to strengthening reading skills with well-designed and explicit instructional interventions, these programs can serve to link children's interests with literacy development by simply getting them to read more broadly, consistently, and intensively in pursuit of their interests (Afterschool Alliance, 2011).

The Importance of Getting to Know Students and Being *Explicit* About Their Learning

Because afterschool and summer programs may have students for a short term, Vanderbilt professor Anita Conn notes that the staff "dive into a preplanned 'program' without taking the necessary time to ascertain individual skills levels and target instruction to each student's needs" (personal interview, 18 September 2011). Afterschool and summer program staff should make it a *priority* to find out about students' backgrounds, communities, home lives, and first languages/language spoken at home. Programs can then provide a learner-centered focus, targeting each student's needs, unique struggles, and potential resources.

Consider this scenario: An afterschool tutor reading *The Little Engine That Could* to a group of K-third graders discovered that not one child knew what an engine was. The tutor stopped, created the schema through pictures and acting out, and *then* proceeded with the story. Comprehension requires that readers know English letters, sounds, and print conventions—but also the *meanings* of words! The tutor recognized and addressed the lack of vocabulary knowledge in her audience: She asked, in pre-reading, what a little engine was; when she saw that nobody knew, she explained and then continued with the story. She targeted her "instruction" based on her informal "assessment" of what her audience did and did not know.

Coordination With Classroom Teachers

Certainly, to the greatest extent possible, afterschool and summer program staff should coordinate their programming with learning in the classroom, either to reinforce it or pre-teach it, and then provide additional opportunities for children to process, to practice, to extend, and to reflect upon the experience. If, for example, the state focuses on state history in fourth grade, the summer or afterschool enrichment activities might involve field trips to local historical sites or guest speakers who present interesting,

Urban Arts Partnership – New York City

Urban Arts Fresh ED and Fresh Prep are two great examples of programs tailored to the interests and backgrounds of their target student demographics. They use hip-hop as a way of developing critical literacy, critical thinking, and test prep skills among youth in New York City. These programs also explore the use of hip-hop as a tool to increase students' synthesis of information, analytics of texts, and performance on standardized assessments.

educational activities that set a context, a background, for learning. When children return from the field trip, or after the speaker talks, staff should be explicit about the experience: "Where did we go? Why? Who lived there? What happened there? What did you learn? Anybody learn any new words? Was our trip interesting? Why? Let's write about it in our journals/write a story for our parents/draw a picture/write the new words on our word list." In this informal discussion and activity, children have an opportunity to engage metacognitively, to recount concretely their experience, to add to their knowledge base, and to add to their vocabulary repertoire.

By contrast, misalignment of in-school, afterschool, and summer program learning goals and objectives creates missed opportunities. Consider the case of an at-risk child. He learned short "a" words (c-an, D-an, p-an) in the regular classroom, consonant blends (br-own, bl-own) in the resource room, and colors (red, blue, brown) in his afterschool program. His homework? Memorize spelling words containing the short "a" sound: bat, man, can, ran, and, hand. His day revealed two missed opportunities for someone else to reinforce what was going on in the classroom.

Other Ways to Encourage Literacy

Even if a particular afterschool or summer program's mission is not specifically to teach reading or to teach the subskills involved, staff still can encourage literacy. Program leaders and staff should ensure that books are available and accessible. A reading corner for children, with many, varied, interesting books and lots of comfy pillows, is invaluable.

In addition to books at the program site, regular visits to the public and school libraries are always a good activity for children and their families. Many libraries provide free or inexpensive resources for summer reading programs. In her groundbreaking study, Barbara Heyns (1975) found that the library, more than any other public institution, contributes to the intellectual growth of children over the summer. Some parents have never been in a library and have never checked out a book; staff can explain the concept of the lending library, reassuring parents that it is okay to let children read library books, as opposed to putting those books away to "protect" them. Story time at the library also provides a nice model for how to read to children.

Importance of Parent Involvement

Finally, afterschool and summer programs should work intentionally to increase and enhance parent involvement. Numerous studies and anecdotal evidence have demonstrated the importance of parent and family involvement in reading (see Fan & Chen, 2001, for a meta-analytic review); however, to create an environment that values the parent as the child's first teacher, programs must be flexible and accommodating. "Business as usual" may need to be modified, scheduling open houses or parent information sessions at different times. Staff should share details about the program and suggest specific ways that parents can support their child's learning offered at multiple times to accommodate parents' schedules. The goal is to empower parents to model and encourage literacy activities, to go to the library, to talk with their children all the time, to tell their own stories.

In communicating with parents, staff should provide and solicit ideas for activities. For example, "literacy activities" can be as simple as reading the back of the cereal box together every morning for 10 minutes during breakfast. Reading Is Fundamental (www.rif.org) and other websites contain a treasure trove of suggested storytime activities.

Program staff should communicate frequently and consistently with the family, but they should make sure that they communicate in such a way that the parent actually receives and understands the message. To that end, staff should closely re-examine the kinds of communications they send to parents. Obviously messages from program staff should not patronize; but messages should, nevertheless, be short and simple. Though program staff would never intend this consequence, many adult new or nonreaders are intimidated by a wall of text. Research indicates that many parents do not think they have the skills to encourage the literacy efforts of their children (Cook-Cottone, 2004), and if staff send home text that parents have no chance of reading, programs have unwittingly verified the parental fears.

On family nights, programs should provide models, help, and multiple opportunities for parents to observe and participate in literacy activities. Translators may be needed, and staff planners should ensure that lots of pictures are associated with text. The bottom line is that programs should help parents understand how important they, as parents, are to the literacy development of their children. Some programs communicate with parents weekly by phone, text, or postcard. Some programs teach parents how to do reading assessment. As Karen Mapp says in frequent presentations, "Parent involvement goes beyond the bake sale!"

Conclusion

Summer and afterschool programs have a great potential to help close the gap in achievement among at-risk populations and to enlist more partners for improved reading and literacy because of their community and family connections.

Serious programs should do their homework to ensure top quality in programming that enhances literacy for children of all ages and levels of achievement. Research abounds on best practices and their foundational philosophical underpinnings. Careful planning on the front end, parent communication and involvement, on-going assessment, and best practices throughout should help many more summer and afterschool programs, leading to increased reading achievement, higher literacy rates, more families of readers, and more literate communities across the country.

For More Information

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) the nation's oldest and largest children's literacy nonprofit: www.rif.org

RIF's extensive collection of expertly designed, scaffolded reading guides and activities for parents, educators, and community coordinators is available at www.rif.org/mbc.

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Well-Designed Homework Time as a Quality-Building Aid in Afterschool

If any children are peering over your shoulder as you read these lines, hide the next sentence from them.

The evidence that homework aids student achievement is inconclusive (Center for Public Education, 2007).

Yet, for many students, not completing homework on time, or completing it incorrectly, can leave them at a serious disadvantage as they try to progress successfully through school. It is also important to note that well-designed homework, instead of just "throwing worksheets at students," is more likely to have merit and can be a positive connection between school and afterschool programs. Combining well-designed homework with other academic enrichment activities in afterschool can provide a well-rounded package of expanded learning opportunities that contribute to school success and positive youth development.

Homework has maintained a role as a traditional component of the education system over many generations, although it has not been totally proven to be effective as a tool for improving students' learning. A battle waged in recent decades over the value of homework did not come to a definitive conclusion, leaving both proponents and opponents with research they can cite to support either side of the debate[1]. It appears that the presence of homework serves more to forestall a decline in performance (Morrison, Storino, Robertson, Weissglass, & Dondero, 2000) rather than to advance achievement; however, making homework completion just one element of a broader, comprehensive afterschool program enhances its value.

Despite the conflicted research base, school policies continue to mandate and teachers continue to assign homework. This reality is where afterschool programs must position themselves, regardless of any personal opinions on homework. The general charge of an afterschool program is to help students succeed in school; and if homework is required by the school, then many afterschool programs see homework support as part of that charge. Going a step further is to encourage staff buy-in and enthusiasm for a program culture that embraces homework time as useful and important, rather than a bore and a chore for all involved.

This commitment to productive homework time can be bolstered by a program's recognition that well-designed homework, as part of a broader afterschool initiative, not only can provide benefits to youth but also serve to reinforce some of the desired— and often required—yet hard-to-come-by program goals: (a) homework is a natural link between afterschool and school, (b) homework is a promising bridge between afterschool and families, (c) homework supports principles of youth development that are central to afterschool programs, and (d) homework help can be a hook to engage students in expanded learning and broader opportunities.

Supporting the School Day and Connecting With Teachers

Homework serves as a natural point of connection between school-day staff and afterschool staff, whose roles are parallel yet often isolated. Many school-day teachers do not ask for help from afterschool, or even do not picture the potential for afterschool programming to aid in school-day goals. The practitioner who takes the first step to building relationships with school-day staff can demonstrate that program practices, such as homework support or tutoring, are working toward the same outcomes the school-day teachers hope to achieve.

Once this common understanding has been reached, the relationship can be maintained through intentional and sustained communication. A regular schedule of check-ins via phone or e-mail or in person should be established. Tools such as a homework contract or a homework completion tracking document allow both sides to stay up-to-date without adding additional strain on job responsibilities. By using such tools and scheduling regular check-ins, afterschool staff can more readily ask school-day teachers for help with students' more difficult assignments. In a time when 89% of students stress about homework (Met Life, 2007) this communication builds trust that makes students more confident in the program's ability to be helpful and meet student needs.

In rural Missouri, for example, the West Plains R-7 Before and After School Education program utilizes the regular school day homework planner to track student assignments and facilitate information sharing between afterschool staff and teachers. The planner includes space for both groups to sign and record relevant information each day. The program director also takes advantage of the school district's data system to track student achievement, routinely meeting with teachers when students fall behind. This real-life example illustrates the kind of collaboration and mutual support that many afterschool programs have found to be a critical ingredient in boosting student achievement.

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1. See, for example, Ramdass & Zimmerman (2011), Cooper, et. al. (2006), Marzano (2003), for research that supports the use of homework. For research that is critical of homework, see Kohn (2006), Bennett & Kalish (2006), and Kralovec & Buell (2000).

Opening up the avenues of communication between school and afterschool was the focus of a pilot project conducted by the University of Pittsburgh's Office of Child Development during the 2010–2011 school year. This project, funded by the Heinz Endowments, was a partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools and five local afterschool program providers. The partnership developed a set of communication strategies based on research that indicates that formal communication between teachers and afterschool providers supports quality homework time in the afterschool setting.

Linking together on homework can even open the door to more substantive school-afterschool collaborations—one of the hallmarks of quality afterschool programs.

Easing the Pressure Off Families

Students are not the only ones whose stress levels rise with homework; in today's society, with more single parents and more dual-income families, the demands of home life leave little time for parents to offer homework help. Most parents want their children to do homework, and they see the importance of connecting with what their children are doing in school, but dinner time, chores, and leisure activities compete with homework time. An overload of homework also competes with sleep, which suffers as a result for students, not just their overtired parents (Dudley-Maring, 2003).

By providing a structured and supportive space for homework time, afterschool programs can become an ally of busy parents. This program role again opens up an opportunity for communication, in this case with families. The tools mentioned above, such as the homework contract, can include families as participants, and informal conversations about homework can reassure parents that their children are completing assignments, indicate what is left to be done at home with bigger projects or additional assignments, and provide a sought-after link by proxy from the parent to the school day. Through this link, an afterschool program kindles homework's role as a cornerstone to facilitating family-to-school communication as it contributes to parents' understanding of what school expectations are and offers direction for how they can support their children (Perlman & Redding, 2011).

For example, the East Allen Family Resource Center in New Haven, Indiana, requires all staff to speak with parents who come to pick up their students in the program and share information about their students' progress with homework. "We really love the parents who choose to pick up their students from the school. It provides such a wonderful opportunity for parents to see what their child is doing, the environment that is provided for them, and have face-to-face time talking with staff," notes the program director. To reach parents who may not be able to pick up their children in person, staff routinely make phone calls to students' homes to discuss student achievement.

In considering homework support as one component of a family involvement plan, an afterschool program is again making strides in the direction of program quality.

Using Homework Time to Enhance Youth Development

Within the body of evidence that exists about homework, studies have shown that homework does play a role in building skills that equip young people to be more efficient and motivated students and prepare them for 21st century careers. By completing homework, students gain soft skills such as greater self-direction, self-discipline, organization, and more independent problem solving (Protheroe, 2009).

In four charter high schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, such skills are coupled with homework time in deliberate lessons taught through "mini clinics" by Foundations, Inc.'s Prep Zone Plus afterschool program. Mini clinics are quick (lasting about 20 minutes), relevant, and engaging lessons that address a variety of study skills and life skills, from reading for meaning to budgeting to selecting colleges. For students who complete their homework early or need extra assistance with certain skills, the mini clinics provide a robust but palatable lesson. Students feel that they are getting more for their time and gaining skills that will be useful as they progress toward college, careers, and independent life.

From its experience of operating homework-based afterschool programs over the past decade, Foundations has learned that a substantive way to improve homework time and other elements of afterschool is to listen to young people in afterschool settings and solicit and use feedback from school-day teachers, administrators, and parents.

Going Beyond Homework

Quality afterschool programs, even homework-based ones, build out engaging learning opportunities that go beyond homework and offer value-added programming. Often after homework time ends, students attend their choice of enrichment clubs (for example, robotics, chess, art, music, cooking, service learning) to round out their afterschool experience. Research shows that afterschool programs with multifaceted programming are more likely to achieve the greatest academic gains (Pearson, Russell, & Reisner, 2007).

Starting in 2011 and continuing through 2012, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Indianapolis has been working to go beyond homework and infuse academics into regular club programming. Through a grant from the Lilly Endowmentand a partnership with the Center for Afterschool and Expanded Learning at Foundations, Inc., Boys and Girls Clubs of Indianapolis has focused on creating a sustainable approach to academically-focused enrichment across seven sites. Staff receive ongoing training on topics such as planning hands-on activities linked to academic standards, project-based learning, STEM, and literacy in out-of-school time. In turn, staff are supported by leadership teams to implement meaningful enrichment activities into a range of existing programming, from art projects to basketball tournaments.

The enrichment opportunities offered on top of homework support help students see how they can apply what they're learning to real-life situations, build confidence through the mastery of new talents or completion of significant projects, and understand the connections between what they are doing now and their future possibilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Relationships with the school day, connections to families, youth development practices, and using the attraction of completing homework to engage students in expanded learning and broader opportunities are enhanced with a positive approach to homework.

Below are a number of key recommendations to make homework a positive component of quality afterschool programs:

- *Set up systems for communication between afterschool instructors and school-day teachers that keep everyone up to date. Do the same with families.*

- *Create a physical environment that encourages homework completion—include quiet space with individual desks for assignments that require deep concentration, bigger tables for study groups to gather, couches for catching up on reading, and a resource area with reference materials.*

- *Build in opportunities for youth choice. Do some students study better when they can listen to music through headphones? Can students seek help from peers or adults? Can they choose which assignment they want to work on first?*

- *Keep homework time active, even when all the assignments are done. Offer short, self-directed activities such as brain teasers, board games, or activity centers that students can enjoy while still reinforcing some academic and 21st century skills . . . not just worksheets.*

- *Sometimes the best homework help is just directing students to the right resources they can employ to answer a tricky question. Refrain from giving them the answer; instead, empower them to find it on their own.*

- *Be aware of families' homework preferences. Some families want their students to complete as much homework as possible in the afterschool program; others may want to work with their children on some assignments at home, too.*

- *Keep groups fluid, not static. Depending on the students, the assignments, and the day, change grouping arrangements frequently.*

- *Expand your own view of homework as a positive element of expanded learning. Remember that you are a role model, and students may adopt your attitude toward homework.*

If afterschool programs—and their school partners—use these recommendations, dogs all across the country can experience fewer stomachaches from the proverbial eating of the homework.

For More Information

SEDL Afterschool Training Toolkit – Homework
http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/about_toolkits.html?tab=homework

Homework Sharing Tool (You for Youth web portal)
http://y4y.ed.gov/Content/Resources/DCID20110713104426.pdf

TASC Resource Brief
https://www.century21me.org/staticme21/academ_achiev/Research%20on%20
Homework%20Help.pdf

What Research Says About the Value of Homework: Research Review
http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Instruction/What-research-says-
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Building a Culture of Attendance: Schools and Afterschool Programs Together Can and Should Make a Difference!

The leaders of SHINE (Schools and Homes in Education) Afterschool Program recently resolved to improve the school-day attendance for the students at their 21st Century Community Learning Centers in rural Pennsylvania. The program reached out to parents, offered incentives to students, and carefully tracked attendance data provided by the schools.

The results: a school attendance rate significantly higher than similar programs nationally, improved communications with parents, and a remarkable collaboration with school teachers that could prove a model for out-of-school-time programs.

"They look at us as an extension of their work," director Jeanne Y. Miller said of the five public and four parochial schools where SHINE operates. "I think we're building the mindset that we're part of what they do."

Research has long shown that good afterschool programs can improve school-day attendance (Huang, Gribbons, Kim, Lee, & Baker, 2000; Welsh et al., 2002). The sense of belonging, the connection to caring adults, and the academic enrichment that afterschool provides can make children more likely to go to school. Often though, improved attendance is a by-product of good programs, rather than a stated goal. SHINE's experience in rural Pennsylvania, as well as an innovative approach used in Baltimore (discussed below), shows what can happen when afterschool programs take an intentional approach to reducing chronic absence.

Defining the Need

Like afterschool programming, efforts to reduce school absences are animated by the need to provide students more time on task in quality learning environments. Children on the edge of failure, in particular, can experience an academic boost if they make it to school every day and spend a few extra hours in enriching activities after school. Right now, however, too many vulnerable children are suffering academically because they miss too much school.

Also, many vulnerable youth do not have access to quality afterschool programs. For example, when states hold a competition for 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, they typically have two to three times more school and community groups applying than there are monies available to fund, leaving many neighborhoods and young people without afterschool programs (O'Donnell, 2013).

Nationwide, one in 10 kindergarten students misses nearly a month of school every year. For many low-income students, chronic absence in kindergarten can translate into poor academic performance throughout elementary school (Chang & Romero, 2008). By sixth grade, poor attendance is a proven indicator of whether a child will drop out of high school, regardless of economic background (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). By ninth grade, missing excessive amounts of school can predict the likelihood of dropping out with more accuracy than past test scores (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

> Afterschool programs are particularly well positioned to make a difference. In addition to providing good programming, afterschool leaders can help schools partner with parents and build good attendance habits.

Unfortunately, many families and schools do not recognize they have a problem with attendance because they do not look at the data in the right way. Schools typically measure average daily attendance and truancy (unexcused absences). They do not pay attention to the total number of days each child misses in excused and unexcused absences. Research shows that when a student misses 10% percent of school days for any reason, or about 18 days, negative effects begin to appear in his/her academic performance (Chang & Romero, 2008). Chronic absenteeism can also affect the rest of the class by inducing the teacher to repeat old material rather than moving forward.

This is a problem that can be fixed. Throughout the country, schools and communities have been able to reduce absenteeism when they monitor attendance data and work together to identify and address barriers that keep children from getting to school every day. Afterschool programs are particularly well positioned to make a difference. In addition to providing good programming, afterschool leaders can help schools partner with parents and build good attendance habits. After all, many parents are more likely to see an afterschool provider at the end of the day, not a teacher.

Notably, attendance is an area of focus in the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, which funds afterschool and summer learning opportunities in almost 11,000 low-income sites across America. At the end of the year, sites are required to submit data to state education officials, including school-day attendance data for participants in the afterschool program. Local afterschool leaders could be using these data gathered during the school year—both the in-school attendance data and

afterschool attendance data—to make improvements in afterschool programming and to enhance partnerships with schools, families, and other child- and family-focused community organizations in order to address poor attendance.

Connecting With Families and Schools

Administered by Lehigh Carbon Community College, SHINE starts its attendance outreach with parents. The program operates across 430 square miles in Pennsylvania's Carbon and Schuylkill counties and draws from a population largely of low-income students—all of them referred for academic reasons, many of them chronically absent.

When families sign up for the afterschool program, providers visit the home to get to know the parents and children. Parents must also sign a contract stressing the importance of attending school and the afterschool program. SHINE sends a midyear letter reinforcing the message.

> Analysis of this data shows that the more students attend SHINE, the better they do in school and the more regular their attendance.

When students do not come to school, they cannot come to SHINE after school. For students who do improve their school-day attendance, SHINE offers rewards: a visit to the "treasure chest" for younger students, gift certificates for others. Parents, too, are entered in monthly drawings for gas cards, family dinners, or trips to Walmart.

It is the interaction with the schools, however, that is key to SHINE's approach. The afterschool providers receive report cards and attendance reports from school teachers every 9 weeks. Providers also track attendance for the afterschool program and submit this data, along with the school district information, to an evaluator.

Analysis of this data shows that the more students attend SHINE, the better they do in school and the more regular their attendance. Specifically, the data show that 88% of the SHINE students had satisfactory school-day attendance. Altogether 78% of the SHINE students improved their academic performance and 96% were promoted to the next grade.

ENCORE! Improving Attendance in Vermont

When the final bell rings in the North Country district schools, more than 1,000 children stay on for fun and engaging learning opportunities through the ENCORE afterschool program. ENCORE takes an intentional approach to attendance by requiring that students attend the regular school day in order to participate in their program. The program also focuses on relationship building between students and their teachers: ENCORE sites are based in their schools, and 90% of the afterschool staff are regular-day employees. This emphasis on strengthening relationships makes young people feel valued, which has led to increased attendance. Regular ENCORE attendees miss 2 less days per year than nonregular attendees.

The ENCORE afterschool program serves students in grades K–8 and provides hands-on and community-based learning approaches not traditionally available during the school day. For example, for fourth grade students studying the history of Vermont, ENCORE devised a program that took students into their communities to learn about the rich history firsthand. ENCORE also introduced a garden program where students learn to plant, cultivate, and care for their gardens while learning the importance of good nutrition. ENCORE also offers creative opportunities, including music, theater, and dance.

Reflecting the Research

SHINE's results echo numerous research studies that have confirmed the role afterschool programs play in improving school-day attendance. Most recently, a 2011 study of the AfterZone program in Providence, Rhode Island, showed that middle school students participating in the program had an absence rate 25% lower than their peers. What's more, the improvement in attendance increased with the amount of time in the program (Kauh, 2011).

A 2009 study of seventh and eighth grade students at 10 Boys & Girls Clubs across the country found that those attending afterschool programs skipped school fewer times, increased school effort, and gained academic confidence; moreover, the first two outcomes cited above increased as the number of days attending afterschool programs increased (Arbreton, Bradshaw, Sheldon, & Pepper, 2009). In many cases, improved school-day attendance is an unexpected bonus. Some programs, such as SHINE and the Baltimore effort discussed below, have begun taking a more intentional approach.

Making It Intentional in Baltimore

Baltimore has made improved attendance a top priority for the city's school district and has engaged the city's child welfare, health, and transit agencies, as well as foundations and church groups, to bring students back to school. Afterschool programs play a key role. The Family League of Baltimore City, which handles the city's out-of-school-time contracts, identifies increased school-day attendance as a key outcome for providers. It prioritizes service to neighborhoods based on chronic absence rates, among other factors. It explicitly asks programs to recruit and enroll students with poor attendance records rather than push out students who might bring down program numbers. It also requires each provider to outline a plan for reducing chronic absence in its application for funds.

The Family League's data show that afterschool is making a difference. At all age levels, students in their programs are less likely to be chronically absent and more likely to be good attenders (missing fewer than 5 days) than the general school population. This holds true, even though the students in these programs are more likely to be living in poverty than the general school population. (For more information, see http://www.flbcinc.org.)

Taking Action

In response to the need to bring nationwide attention to the problem of chronic school absenteeism, Attendance Works was established as a national and state initiative in 2010 to promote better policy and practice around school attendance. The organization works to examine the causes, consequences, and potential responses to missing extended periods of school, starting in the early grades.

Building upon the experience of pioneering programs as well as emerging research, Attendance Works recommends schools and afterschool programs work together in the following ways:

1. **Build a strong culture of attendance in the school and the afterschool program.** Strategies can include establishing a clear policy about the importance of attendance, offering incentives and other motivating activities, and analyzing attendance data to identify areas that need improvement.

2. **Target students with at-risk levels of absence for recruitment and engagement in afterschool programming.** Especially for students who are just beginning to have problematic attendance, the extra support of afterschool may be just what they need.

3. **Share data on program and school attendance.** Such data sharing is critical for identifying students in trouble, regardless of when they are experiencing an attendance problem, and evaluating the impact of program participation on in-school attendance.

4. **Combine resources to engage families around the issue of attendance.** Together, school and afterschool staff can educate parents and students about the importance of going to school every day, as well as solicit their perspectives about the barriers to attendance and how they could be overcome.

5. **Make better use of attendance data reported annually for 21st Century Community Learning Centers.** Program staff should collect and review in-school and afterschool attendance data throughout the year to identify students with chronic absence who might need additional support and to determine if any afterschool classrooms are challenged with large numbers of students with poor attendance. An unusually high level of poor attendance could suggest a lack of engaging afterschool activities, an unresolved problem with bullying affecting all the students in a class, or a problem with the facilities that is creating an unsafe or unhealthy classroom environment. Poor attendance can be an early warning sign that intervention is needed in order to maintain a high quality program.

Attendance Works has a valuable Tools and T.A. section that contains a self-assessment tool to help afterschool programs reflect upon their approach to improving school-day attendance, as well as flyers in English and Spanish to help educate parents about the importance of regular attendance for their children's academic success (http://www.attendanceworks.org/). To see an example of a professional development program aimed at strengthening the capacity of afterschool providers to improve school-day attendance, visit the website of the Maryland Out of School Time Network: http://www.mdoutofschooltime.org/Attendance.html.

Leveraging the power of afterschool programs to reduce chronic absence is especially important now given the economic challenges facing communities and schools and the growing number of students at risk of academic failure and dropping out. By having an impact on attendance, afterschool programs can clearly demonstrate how they benefit students and schools and better justify their own funding.

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A Proven Solution for Dropout Prevention: Expanded Learning Opportunities

A successful student in the 21st century is expected to graduate from high school; be prepared for the workforce, additional postsecondary education, or military service; and be able to participate in society as a productive, engaged citizen—one who votes, pays taxes, and serves on juries when called. Yet nearly 25% of America's youth do not complete high school on time, and in low-income communities, the rate of dropping out is much higher than the national average (Stillwell, 2010). These young people consequently lack many of the basic skills needed for future success.

The anecdotal reasons provided by students for dropping out of school, both before and after they actually leave school, are well documented and have been consistent for more than a decade. Most of the reasons focus on students' dissatisfaction with school policies and practices. In addition, students in high-risk circumstances (such as poverty) demonstrate a high disengagement with school, sometimes starting very early in elementary school or even before enrolling in school. Generally, these are the most common reasons provided by students:

- *I didn't like school.*
- *I didn't like the teachers.*
- *I didn't see the value in the schoolwork I was asked to do.*
- *I had family issues.*

The research literature, moreover, is convincing regarding a broad range of risk factors associated with dropping out of school. A review of this research by the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University has identified an extensive set of risk factors organized into four domains (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007):

A. Individual Factors (referring to the student)

- *Lacks future orientation*
- *Low academic achievement levels*
- *Low attendance*
- *Special learning needs*

B. Family Factors

- *Low socioeconomic status*
- *Low expectations for schooling*
- *Mobility of family*
- *Language and literacy levels*

C. School Factors

- *Lack of alternatives for learning opportunities*
- *No individual learning plans for students*
- *Unfair behavior and disciplines issues*
- *Retention policies*

D. Community Factors

- *Lack of community involvement*
- *Lack of support for schools*
- *High levels of violence and drug abuse*
- *Few recreational facilities*

Unfortunately, there is no "silver bullet" to reduce the persistent and unacceptably high dropout rate across America. While a range of strategies is needed to improve the high school graduation rate, one especially promising tool is that of quality afterschool and summer learning programs. These programs routinely incorporate strategies that complement and align well with effective, research-based dropout prevention programs. The purpose of this article is to illustrate how afterschool and summer learning programs and dropout prevention initiatives can be integrated in order to generate increased school attendance, continued student academic gains, and improved behavioral patterns, all leading to increased graduation rates.

Research Supporting Complementary Strategies: Expanded Learning Opportunities and Dropout Prevention

Longstanding research by the NDPC has identified 15 effective strategies to reduce the dropout rate, one of which is specifically providing afterschool opportunities (Smink & Schargel, 2004). An added advantage is that afterschool and summer learning opportunities delivered through strong school-community partnerships can readily incorporate many other effective dropout prevention strategies identified in the research.

To show this confluence of potential, it is valuable to compare the match between several of the dropout prevention strategies and the common elements of quality, comprehensive afterschool and summer programs.

To gain a nationwide perspective on this potential, it is valuable to review the offerings and elements of the largest nationwide funding source for afterschool and summer learning, the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. While the specific services provided to youth vary across communities to match local needs, programs funded through this initiative commonly include a focus on mentoring, tutoring, counseling for substance abuse and violence prevention, community service, recreation activities, and youth leadership activities, all of which are associated with effective dropout prevention programs.

Comparing directly a number of the key dropout prevention strategies against the core elements of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool and summer programs makes it clear that well-designed and well-implemented afterschool, summer learning, and dropout prevention programs align very closely (See Table 1).

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Table 1. The match between recommended dropout prevention strategies and required or recommended offerings in 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Recommended Dropout Prevention Strategies	Required or Recommended Offerings in 21st Century Community Learning Centers
School-community collaboration	YES
Family engagement	YES
Mentoring/tutoring	YES
Service learning	YES
Active learning	YES
Professional development	YES
Educational technology	YES
Individualized instruction	YES
Career and technical education	YES for older youth

Another important comparison of the potential of quality afterschool and summer programs is to study the results of afterschool programs leading to school success against the findings of early warning factors linked to dropping out of school.

Research finds that quality afterschool programs can positively affect a number of key school success factors. In a meta-analysis, Durlak, Weissburg, and Pachan (2010), for example, analyzed more than 60 studies of afterschool programs that include emotional, social, and academic development components. They found that those programs meeting quality criteria demonstrated a positive impact in many key areas:

- *School grades*
- *School attendance*
- *Self-perception*
- *Reduction in problem behaviors*
- *Academic achievement (test scores)*
- *Positive social behavior*
- *School bonding*

Further, assessments by classroom teachers of students participating in 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs reveal results similar to those of Durlak et al. These teacher assessments have found that participating students demonstrated improvement in these areas:

> . . . it is very apparent that the student success factors associated with quality afterschool programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers directly address the predictive factors associated with dropping out of school . . .

- *Greater homework completion*
- *Better school attendance*
- *Better grades*
- *More positive engagement*
- *Less misbehavior*
- *Improved test scores (Learning Point Associates, 2012).*

When this research on the positive impacts of quality afterschool and summer programs is compared with the research on what is needed to help young people stay on a path to high school graduation, it is very apparent that the student success factors associated with quality afterschool programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers directly address the predictive factors associated with dropping out of school (see Table 2).

Table 2. Predictive factors of dropping out of school matched against the impact of quality afterschool and 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Predictive Factors Of Dropping Out	Impact of Quality Afterschool From Meta-analysis by Durlak et al.	Results from 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Failing grades in reading and/or math	Improved grades in reading and math	Better grades in reading and math
Poor attendance	Improved school attendance	Better school attendance
Misbehavior	Reduction in problem behaviors	Less misbehavior
Very low test scores	Improved academic achievement (test scores)	Increased test scores
Lack of effort/motivation	Positive social behavior	More positive engagement
Not engaging in class or school work	More positive school bonding	Greater homework completion

The meta-analysis from over 60 studies by Durlak et al. and the many years of data from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers paint a clear picture that quality afterschool and summer programs can have a positive impact on the early warning indicators for students with a high potential for dropping out of school and not graduating.

Real Life Lessons Learned: Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs, Including 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs

There are many different program objectives for afterschool and summer programs and for community-based learning centers in the context of school-community partnerships across the nation. Basically, these programs are designed in whole or in part to deliver academic programs, provide additional supports, find ways to inspire young people to stay engaged in learning, and/or offer enrichment opportunities to students and sometimes to other family members, as well.

In light of the research discussed above, expanded learning programs, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers, can be designed and implemented in such a way that they can purposefully include dropout prevention strategies and other quality elements that will have positive effects on student success. What follows are several examples of noteworthy programs:

- *The Colorado MESA program in Denver, Colorado, is a premier educational resource and experiential program serving students throughout high school. MESA's mission is to increase the number of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students who graduate from high school fully prepared for post-secondary education in engineering, math, science, computer science, business, and other math and science-based fields. Hands-on activities, team building, and mentoring help build social and literacy skills. Field trips to*

colleges, universities, and industry sites, as well as engineering and science-related design challenges, excite students, sharpen their skills, and increase their awareness of career opportunities (Afterschool Alliance, 2009).

- *RiverzEdge Arts Project in Providence, Rhode Island, is an art and leadership program where high school students work with artists in fine and commercial arts. They guide youth to create art, and they run an arts enterprise in an environment that stresses hands-on learning, teamwork, mutual respect, responsibility, and workplace discipline. Participants build self-awareness and work skills by creating and selling products and services in the competitive arts and business markets, developing their creative voice, and preparing them for the job market. One hundred percent of participants go on to graduate high school in a city with a 34 percent dropout rate (Afterschool Alliance, 2009).*

- *Funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, EduCare is the afterschool provider at seven Los Angeles School District high schools. EduCare's programs are designed to give students the opportunity to develop their unique abilities, build relationships, and find relevance in their educational experience. Program activities are unique to each school and include homework assistance and tutoring, academic enrichment, structured fitness classes, and performing and fine arts activities. The 2011 graduation rate for students participating in EduCare afterschool programs over the course of 4 years of high school was 90%, as compared to 60% for nonparticipating students. School attendance and standardized test scores also significantly improved (EduCare Foundation, 2011).*

These examples illustrate the growing evidence that some of the predictive factors associated with dropping out of school can be successfully addressed in part through quality afterschool and summer programs and 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Conclusion: Maximizing the Combined Power of Expanded Learning Opportunities and Dropout Prevention Programs

The lessons learned from both successful 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, as well as other quality afterschool and summer learning programs, and successful dropout prevention programs should serve as the standard for all new or revised programs designed to increase high school graduation rates. Programs should provide students with these opportunities and supports:

- *Engage actively in the strategies found in both types of program environments.*

- *Acquire extra critical thinking skills as well as basic skills.*

- *Develop positive attitudes.*

- *Keep on track to progress successfully through each step of the education pipeline (for example, maintain passing grades, develop regular attendance habits, stay out of trouble, bring up very low test scores).*

- *See a real and direct connection to jobs, careers, and/or 2- to 4-year colleges.*

Programs should also use these strategies:

- *Engage community organizations and schools as collaborators in time beyond the typical school day (e.g., afterschool, weekends, summers) to help more students succeed.*

- *Involve families outside the traditional school day, both in their own learning and supporting their child(ren)'s success.*

- *Deploy quality standards linked to successful programming and results. (See, for example: Durlak et al., 2010; Huang & Dietel, 2011)*

Although virtually any student could benefit from expanded learning opportunities and school-family-community partnerships, those students in high-risk situations or struggling in school will tend to benefit the most from quality expanded learning opportunities, especially those programs that implement intentional strategies geared to helping students graduate from high school. Now is the time to tap the potential of quality afterschool and summer learning programs—especially those embracing the vision of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative—in support of a nationwide commitment to increasing America's high school graduation rate.

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Building Mastery of the Common Core State Standards by Expanding Learning With Community Stakeholder Partnerships

The development of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core) marks a major turning point in the history of the U.S. public education system. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices coordinated a state-led, multiyear effort to create the standards in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts from across the nation. The Common Core (http://www.corestandards.org) addresses three leading concerns in our nation's fight for education reform: an inadequate number of students prepared for college and careers, a lack of equity in academic expectations across and within states, and the inability to compare results across states. The Common Core provides clearly defined and consistent standards that represent the knowledge and skills students should acquire within their K–12 education in English language arts and mathematics. These standards are intended to serve as a framework to prepare our children for college and to compete in the global workforce. Through widespread adoption in 45 states and the District of Columbia, educators, administrators, and parents can ensure consistent expectations and support for students, regardless of their zip code.

The Common Core is the "what," not the "how." Although we have accomplished a great deal since 2010, there is still a mountain to climb to ensure successful implementation, assessment, and student mastery of the Common Core. CCSSO has prioritized implementation by providing advocacy, communications, and technical resources to state education agencies through its Implementing the Common Core Standards (ICCS) Collaborative (http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/The_Common_Core_State_Standards_Initiative.html). The organization is also involved with two consortia of

states committed to developing and sharing comprehensive assessment instruments aligned with Common Core: the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SMARTER) and the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

There are also various other stakeholder groups that are playing significant roles in helping students actualize their potential through the standards. Among these significant stakeholders are expanded learning educators across every state, including leaders in local 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs, who are providing before- and afterschool, weekend, and summer programs. These expanded learning opportunities are an essential component to help students master the Common Core.

- *They support teachers and administrators with additional resources both within and outside the school. These resources provide the necessary student learning supports to help ensure that more students master the rigorous content.*

- *They allow students to go deeper in their learning and development to become college and career ready. Often the flexibility in afterschool and summer programs encourages more active and hands-on learning, with direct connections to workforce and college access opportunities.*

- *They promote student engagement and effective learning habits that are important for students to successfully progress toward on-time graduation. College and career readiness typically necessitates a broad set of skills and dispositions that afterschool and summer learning can help encourage, reinforce, and perhaps even help deliver with community, workforce, and college partners.*

With the effects of devastating state cuts in education, coupled with high drop-out rates as well as high numbers of college students needing remediation courses upon entering post-secondary institutions (Lee, Rawls, Edwards, & Menson, 2011), our schools have been forced to face the reality that they cannot increase student achievement alone. There is a need to coordinate sustainable, cost-effective resources for schools to ensure mastery of the Common Core.

Researcher Robert Balfanz (2010) has shown that student achievement is not fully academic in nature. Challenges can include decreased engagement, academics or poverty. Schools may find a critical need for a "second shift" of human resources to support students in overcoming these challenges and achieving educational goals.

Afterschool and summer learning programs are designed to resource this "second shift." Through partnerships, these programs work directly with schools, teachers and parents. Districts can design a comprehensive system of support to ensure that students are completing homework, receiving adequate tutoring, maintaining consistent attendance, and receiving appropriate physical and/or social-emotional supports for their academic achievement. Some students may even be able to recover course credit, accumulate new course credits, or explore career and college options through afterschool and summer learning partnerships with colleges, employers, or youth organizations.

An expanded learning educator, with a clear understanding of the math concepts students are studying within the context of the Common Core, is uniquely situated to provide targeted opportunities for students to deepen their learning by applying new concepts through enrichment activities. More time and attention is accorded the skills espoused by the Common Core, increasing the students' likelihood to understand the underlying concepts and acquire key skills that enable them to demonstrate their competency (CCSSO, 2011).

Many afterschool and summer learning programs are well positioned to support learning practices and conditions that accelerate the "habits of mind," which represent the capacities and practices students should exhibit while learning the Common Core, including the following:

English/Language Arts Capacities of a Literate Individual

- *Demonstrate independence.*
- *Build strong content knowledge.*
- *Respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.*
- *Comprehend as well as critique.*
- *Value evidence.*
- *Use technology and digital media strategically and capably.*
- *Come to understand other perspectives and cultures.*

Mathematical Practices to Master Grade-Level Standards

- *Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.*
- *Reason abstractly and quantitatively.*
- *Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.*
- *Model with mathematics.*
- *Use appropriate tools strategically.*
- *Attend to precision.*
- *Look for and make use of structure.*
- *Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.*

Afterschool and summer learning programs provide an extended platform on which students can build their expertise in these habits. Expanded learning programs typically use experiential learning strategies that include activities that cater to students' academic needs and their particular areas of interest. Such activities are offered in the form of extracurricular arts, STEM, civic/cultural, or athletic programs; service learning; internships; apprenticeships; mentoring; dual college enrollment; and virtual learning. These programs begin through early-childhood education opportunities. They include partnerships with community-based organizations, corporate and local businesses, state and local government agencies, arts and science organizations, higher education institutions, and faith-based communities. In essence, through expanded learning programs, the community becomes the 21st century classroom.

States and districts can structure frequent and robust opportunities for teachers, principals, and expanded learning program staff to learn and work together. As states are rolling out their implementation plans for districts, they should introduce their afterschool professionals to the standards alongside teachers and principals. This expanded learning workforce will be tutoring and mentoring, designing STEM enrichment projects and activities, leading literacy classes, teaching digital media and photography, and coaching drama, dance, debate, and journalism clubs. How powerful would it be if these adult staff and volunteers were paired with teachers and administrators in regularly scheduled collaborative sessions on what students will be learning? How powerful would it be if expanded learning staff and volunteers used their planned activities as a platform for students to demonstrate their deeper understanding of a math or English language arts standard? What if all of this learning was shared across the implicit boundaries between teachers and expanded learning providers, thereby building a comprehensive and cohesive alignment between the adults who are educating and supporting all students?

> In essence, through expanded learning programs, the community becomes the 21st century classroom.

We are starting to see these essential collaborations take shape:

- *In Wisconsin, district and local expanded learning programs are connecting with school curriculum online and directly with teachers. They include current and retired teachers on their staff to facilitate effective engagement with schools and the academic content students are learning (Holsted, 2012).*

- *The Massachusetts Afterschool Partnership has worked with a leading arts curriculum publisher and the Massachusetts Cultural Council to develop an out-of-school-time arts curriculum called "Creative Minds." This curriculum lists the math core standards that are embedded in each activity (Topal, 2011).*

- *The Georgia Afterschool Investment Council published their revised "afterschool quality standards" to include intentional alignment to the Common Core (Georgia Afterschool Investment Council, 2011).*

- *The New Jersey State Afterschool Network (NJSACC), in cooperation with the New Jersey State Department of Education, completed a statewide pilot training program on the Common Core for afterschool program leaders. Training sessions focused on how to align student activities and curriculum with the Common Core.*

We are also seeing this type of collaboration between state education agencies and the statewide afterschool networks in Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, South Dakota, New Mexico, North Carolina, and New Hampshire. It is becoming an effective mechanism to deploy Common Core training to local expanded learning program providers, especially

21st Century Community Learning Centers grantees. A recent commentary by the Forum for Youth Investment highlights the unique role program leaders can play in communicating about the Common Core to help schools build stronger relationships with families and the community (Devaney & Yohalem, 2012).

The Common Core is a catalyst to build a transformative education system that provides unique learning experiences for students while leading them to high scholastic achievement. However, it will take investment from all stakeholders, including expanded learning leaders, to develop the comprehensive supports our students, and schools, will need to achieve mastery.

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Providing Innovative Opportunities and Options for Credit Recovery Through Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

Credit recovery refers to efforts undertaken to allow students to earn high school Carnegie units needed for graduation. Credit recovery permits students to make up courses that they have previously failed due to excessive absences, inability to grasp the content, or other factors associated with academic failure.

Credit recovery programs take various forms, ranging from retaking a course in an alternative time or setting (before school, after school, in night school, or during the summer) or through an alternative methodology (via an approved project that satisfies course requirements or through online learning). Generally, students are eligible to enroll in credit recovery programs if they have met the "seat time" requirements for a course needed for graduation but have failed to meet the end-of-course standards required to receive credit; that is, if they have attempted to take the course and failed, rather than taking it for the first time.

Online credit recovery programs are increasingly prevalent due to the pressure felt by school districts to improve graduation rates through the No Child Left Behind Act coupled with the increase in educational technology in schools and the growth in providers of online course content aligned with state education standards.

Among states reporting dropout data to the U.S. Department of Education in 2006, 26.8% of public high school students do not graduate with a regular diploma 4 years after starting ninth grade. The report also shows that students from low-income families were roughly 10 times less likely to complete high school between 2006 and 2007 than were students from high-income families. In October 2007, approximately 3.3 million civilian non-institutionalized (meaning those not committed to an institution) 16- through 24-year-olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009).

Failure to obtain a high school diploma has severe consequences. The annual median income of a male over the age of 24 without a high school diploma is approximately $27,000. By contrast, a similar individual with a high school diploma earns almost $37,000 annually (Sable, Gaviola, & Hoffman, 2007). High school dropouts also face higher rates of imprisonment; those without high school diplomas are more likely to end up incarcerated than those who complete high school successfully (Harlow, 2003). The financial and social costs stemming from high school failure and high dropout rates in the United States are enormous when considering the loss of income and productivity and the costs of incarceration and rehabilitation. It has been estimated that dropouts cost the nation billions of dollars annually (Ou & Reynolds, 2010).

Promising Practices for Credit Recovery

As the need for credit recovery programs has become more apparent and urgent, districts have begun to look toward advances in instructional technology as a solution. Unfortunately, many obstacles prevent students in need of credit recovery from taking advantage of the flexibility and convenience of online learning, including a lack of computer skills (Oliver et al., 2007) and the self-regulation skills required for independent study (Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004). Moreover, those students most in need of credit recovery—those in urban environments and those living in poverty—often do not have access to technology, or they attend schools with poor technology infrastructure, making online learning frustrating and impractical. Students are therefore more likely to drop out from and fail online courses than they are from traditional face-to-face courses (Roblyer, 2006).

Hybrid courses—that is, online courses that include in-person interactions—lead to greater academic success and student retention (Cavanaugh et al., 2004). As a result, students who require credit recovery in order to graduate and who attempt to get back on track academically through an online intervention appear to experience higher levels of success in a blended environment. Also, as Cavanaugh et al. (2004) noted, "online learning has the unique capability for immersing students in information and communication technologies (ICT) beyond the traditional classroom." Developing ICT skills is especially important for students who do not have regular and meaningful access to learning opportunities that integrate technology in their traditional classrooms.

Credit Recovery in Afterschool and Summer Learning Programs

Afterschool and summer learning programs supported by 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding are especially well-suited for online, asynchronous credit-recovery efforts. These programs typically employ a variety of innovative instructional techniques, offering a nontraditional approach to student learning that differs from regular school-day instruction and that incorporates a specific emphasis on youth development. In the particular case of credit recovery programs offered by 21st Century Community Learning Centers and other similar afterschool and summer programs funded by other sources, the youth development focus includes helping students set and achieve academic goals, developing students' confidence in their ability to acquire credits and progress to graduation (self-efficacy beliefs), and also developing and refining students' self-regulation skills required for independent study.

Successful 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool and summer programs, as well as other similar afterschool and summer programs, typically employ alternative systems to monitor student behavior, progress, and achievement. They also seek to provide curricula and activities that are relevant, enjoyable, and flexible, especially with regard to high school students. Notably, afterschool and summer learning programs that offer credit recovery are essentially asking students to engage in academic activities during their free time, in the same disciplines in which these students have experienced failure. This creates a significant challenge; however, it is the *nontraditional* nature of 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool and summer programs that enables them to attract and retain students.

By jettisoning typical barriers to student achievement, online credit recovery learning management systems allow students to interact directly with the instructional content. For example, the content of the course and the pace of the instructor are not controlled by the teacher, but by the student. Students can therefore progress at their own pace, without the teacher as gatekeeper. The student can also repeat sections of content, test out of others, and avoid the issues that often arise in classrooms related to management and discipline. Also, these afterschool and summer programs empower students to take control of their own learning. Unlike regular school-day progams, afterschool and summer programs are voluntary. Students can opt out, and this power gives the students a sense of agency—another important program goal for high school students.

In short, as a result of their innovative practices and nontraditional approaches, 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool and summer programs are especially well suited for technologically-mediated credit recovery because (1) they are attended by students who are voluntarily present, (2) they are staffed by professionals who bring a youth-development (rather than a narrow, academically-focused) approach to student progress, and (3) they do not replicate the structures and oversight mechanisms of traditional day school programs.

Examples From the Field

In light of mounting national urgency to increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates, education practitioners and advocates alike are giving increased attention to the potential of afterschool and summer learning programs to provide additional resources and supports needed by students who are at-risk of dropping out. The following programs explicitly target potential dropouts with a set of focused strategies, including credit recovery, aimed at helping these students alter their trajectory so that they achieve success in school and persist until they graduate.

Fordham University's 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is conducted on the university campus after school and during the summer and is designed explicitly to provide opportunities and supports for credit recovery for at-risk high school students. The program uses an online learning management system, PLATO, to help students earn credits in academic subjects and make progress toward graduation. Supported by licensed teachers and Fordham University undergraduate mentors, as well as a licensed social worker, participants receive one-on-one guidance in note taking, Internet research, and study skills. Students are also invited to visit university events and college classes and to eat dinner regularly in the campus cafeteria with their undergraduate mentors. Parents and adult family members of participating students

can take free classes in workforce development, technology, and English skills, and they can take other workshops provided through partnerships with local community-based organizations. Over the course of the latest reporting period, 250 students recovered 539 high school credits. Of the 256 students enrolled during the 2010–11 academic year, 175 (68%) earned a total of 346.5 credits. Of the 134 students enrolled for credit recovery during the summer leading up to the 2010–11 school year, 106 (79%) earned a total of 192 credits (New York State Dept. of Education, 2011).

The Seminole County (Florida) Public Schools Midway Safe Harbor Center operates the "Last Best Chance" program—a credit-recovery initiative that engages highly qualified teachers and tutors to provide intensive intervention to students who are at risk of dropping out of school because of low performance and repeated behavioral reprimands. Students are also matched with community mentors to promote positive relationships and continuous support for academic success. Moreover, the initiative includes a character education component, designed to foster cooperation and communication with others. Activities focus on the development of appropriate verbal skills that enable participants to effectively communicate needs without verbal aggression or bullying.

Habitat for Humanity of North Idaho and Post Falls High School have combined to create a cooperative apprenticeship program called Learn to Earn in Hayden, Idaho. Students get hands-on experience and earn school credits by working on Habitat for Humanity construction sites. Students pick up skills in all phases of a construction project, are able to apply their work experience toward earning their diploma, and make contacts in the construction field with the potential for employment after graduation (Afterschool Alliance, 2009).

Students in need of credit recovery at Blair High School in Pasadena, California, have found success through the BlairLEARNS program. The grades 7–12 school offers a rich assortment of afterschool programs, from cutting-edge technology to sports to academic support and credit recovery. As a result, the school's on-time graduation rate is up 28% since 2004. In 2007, more than a third of the graduating class participated in the credit recovery program (Afterschool Alliance, 2009).

Recommendations

- **Strong partnerships with feeder schools/day program.** *A successful credit recovery program sponsored by community-based afterschool partners depends upon close collaboration with feeder schools. These partnerships will enable the afterschool credit recovery program to identify students who are struggling in the traditional classroom setting and who, in the judgment of teachers and counselors, can thrive in an afterschool program with an academic focus. Also, feeder programs can provide support for afterschool partners by encouraging students to persist in attending the afterschool program, by taking note of any positive effects that participation in credit recovery has on students' current academic performance (like behavior and attendance), and perhaps most importantly, by ensuring that all requirements for credit have been completed.*

- **Flexible scheduling.** *Since afterschool credit recovery programs focus on adolescent learners, flexible scheduling is imperative. Especially for nontraditional high school students who may have children of their own, family responsibilities, or jobs, afterschool credit recovery programs need rolling enrollment and flexible policies for arrival and departure.*

- **Family involvement.** *Communication with the home is essential for afterschool programs, and credit recovery is no exception. Parents or caregivers must be informed about the importance of their child's recovering credits and progressing towards graduation. Family involvement includes communicating about attendance and academic progress, as well as celebrating success by notifying the family when a credit is recovered. Successful programs also offer courses for parents and adult family members in workforce development and technology.*

- **Ongoing staff development.** *Since many credit recovery programs in afterschool settings rely on learning management systems, staff development in technology is essential. Also, staff must learn new ways of interacting with students that differ distinctly from traditional relationships between teachers and students. The very presence of students in afterschool credit recovery programs is evidence that traditional school-based approaches have not been successful for these students, so alternative methods of instruction and interaction are needed. Each program will have somewhat different specific professional development needs; however, staff development around emerging cultural, technological, and instructional issues is imperative.*

- **Effective evaluation strategies.** *Tightly coupled with the need for ongoing staff development is the need for regular and systematic evaluation to identify strengths and weaknesses of the program. All constituent groups invested in the program should be part of the evaluation, including students, families, feeder school staff, and program staff. Importantly, the evaluation should include, if possible, assessment of the instructional environment of students' school-day classes so that program refinements can be made, based in part on those findings.*

- **Strong technological infrastructure.** *If the credit recovery program depends on technology, the technical infrastructure must be solid and reliable. Nothing will undermine a program's reputation among students faster than technology that does not work. This requires a commitment of funding and staff.*

- **Post-secondary focus.** *Experiences of post-high school life are essential motivating factors for academically at-risk high school students. Successful credit-recovery programs offer students support in post-secondary preparation and planning, including visits to colleges; assistance with college essays, applications, and financial aid forms; and sponsorship of workforce development workshops that improve interview skills and support resume writing.*

- **Youth development emphasis.** *Successful credit-recovery programs incorporate a youth development emphasis that essentially permeates the program culture. This helps students feel that staff members are invested in their future, provides authentic opportunities for student agency and leadership, and helps create and maintain meaningful relationships between staff and students. These relationships often take the form of mentoring by successful program completers or volunteers from local colleges and the community.*

Conclusion

As a result of their innovative and nontraditional approaches to student learning—freed from the constraints of regular school day and school year programs—21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool and summer programs have been able to embrace credit recovery programs that are highly engaging for high school students who have struggled academically. These programs typically employ online learning management systems along with in-person support, and freed from the constraints of regular school-day and school-year programs, they allow students to accumulate credits at their own pace, thereby empowering them to take control of their learning.

As a result, credit recovery through engaging afterschool and summer learning programs, like those supported by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, offer many struggling high school students the opportunity to experience academic success, often for the first time—and these successes typically carry over into their regular school-day classes. This creates a major "win" for all stakeholders involved: the students and their families, their high schools and communities, and of course, these highly-innovative afterschool programs themselves.

Additional Program Examples

The following examples are drawn from Afterschool Alliance Issue Brief #39: *Afterschool: Providing a Successful Route to Credit Attainment and Recovery* (August 2009).

- **Prep Zone** *in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is an innovative high school afterschool program that offers students the opportunity to earn credit during afterschool time for substantial projects that apply classroom learning to real-world situations. The program includes rigorous coursework, development of an entrepreneurial project and business plan, and culminates in levels of competitions where the students can win grants and computers.*

- **EVOLUTIONS (EVOking Learning & Understanding Through Investigations of the Natural Sciences)***, is a free program at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut, that serves underrepresented, inner city older youth. Students earn academic credit at their schools for participating in a program revolving around science career awareness/literacy, college preparation and transferable skills development. Students design and construct their own museum exhibition and produce DVDs that teach state science standards to elementary students. They also go on a 2- to 3-day college visitation trip and visit another museum in the region, all free of charge. One component of the program provides students with paid opportunities as trained interpreters of museum resources. The local school district provides free transportation in the form of free city bus passes, allowing for greater access by the students most in need.*

- **Hallways to Learning** *in Kewanee, Illinois, used the results of a student survey to design their program. Students indicated what their interests and goals were, and they now have the opportunity to participate in a cardio club, a jazz ensemble, a writing club, culture club, film club and book club. Woven throughout the curriculum is a credit retrieval program that helps students graduate with their peers.*

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Achieving, Connecting, Thriving: Afterschool and Summer Learning in Collaboration With Schools

Too many young people struggle in school and need more targeted and engaging learning opportunities to succeed. Afterschool and summer programs provide such opportunities to learn and grow, both in a formal school setting and in the community beyond the school walls. For low-income families, however, such programs are in short supply and are typically inaccessible for a variety of reasons (for example, high cost; lack of transportation; or the use of different programming schedules for children of various ages, making coordination of child care difficult).

Research supports what educators and parents have long known: strong afterschool and summer programs produce results for children and youth. There is growing evidence that quality afterschool programs make a positive difference in the areas that contribute to school success—higher attendance, better grades, and improved behavior (Huang et al., 2007; Goerge, Cusick, Wasserman, & Gladden, 2007; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). There is substantial evidence that summer learning loss is a serious problem that disproportionately affects low-income students (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; McCombs et al., 2011). Equally compelling is the mounting evidence that quality programs can stem, or even reverse, summer learning loss and prepare young people to begin the next grade ready to learn and build upon their previous success (Borman, Goetz, & Dowling, 2009; Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000).

Unfortunately, in the search to find the "silver bullet" for American education, afterschool and summer learning are often considered optional and, in a time of tight budgets, frequently pitted against each other in competition for scarce resources. A more productive approach is to explore afterschool and summer learning as complementary strategies that can combine to strengthen instruction during the regular school year. Understanding and leveraging this connection will enable greater numbers of students to experience academic and developmental success.

Community organizations increasingly have the "people power" to help more young people keep up, catch up, and get motivated to stay in school and learn. These organizations often find it difficult, however, to link their services to struggling students or schools, and vice versa. How can we better harness these expanded learning opportunities to stimulate students' interest and success? What would a well-coordinated, integrated, and sustainable system of afterschool and summer supports look like?

This paper explores how Boston is working to connect afterschool and summer learning, uniting schools and community partners to help more young people achieve, connect, and thrive. Other similar efforts are also emerging across America. Several will be cited near the end of the article, but many more are needed to meet the demand.

A Vision for an Integrated Learning System

Under the leadership of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, Boston has doubled the number of young people in afterschool programs over the past decade. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program has been a vital source of funding for this expansion in Boston. Recently, major funding from other public and private sources has also been invested in these programs. As a result, nearly every elementary and middle school in the district now offers its students some form of afterschool program. More than 700 organizations offer over 1,700 afterschool and summer programs for Boston's children. This proliferation of programs and community partnerships brings extraordinary potential to address students' academic and social-emotional needs and to stimulate their interests and motivation.

Afterschool and summer learning programs are critical to supplementing instruction and meeting the educational and developmental needs of our young people. They help provide students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that are critical to success in school, college, careers, and life. They bring resources and approaches that no one school, or even school district, could provide on its own. Moreover, they are generally cost effective when compared to other models because they can take advantage of a wide array of school and community resources that often are underutilized in the afterschool hours and during the summer.

Boston stands as one example of a district that is creating a unified and integrated learning system that addresses the whole child, throughout the whole day and the whole year. This system embraces a comprehensive approach to student learning, drawing on the strengths of a variety of community partners, from sports and the arts to social justice, leadership, and environmental education.

A Framework for School-Community Collaboration

In order to align school, afterschool, and summer, we developed a common vision and shared vocabulary for the skills that students need to succeed in school, work, and life. Boston stakeholders are uniting around a framework to support the implementation of this vision. Derived from the best of the youth development field and afterschool program providers themselves, the Achieving-Connecting-Thriving Framework is informing how schools and community organizations collaborate.

This framework highlights the skills that research from a number of fields, including education and developmental psychology, suggests are important for success in school, college, and 21st century careers.

- *"Achieving" is about self-management skills—the skills necessary to succeed academically, including critical and creative thinking, flexibility, and planning—that help students master an objective or complete a task.*

- *"Connecting" is about relationship skills—including teamwork, communication, and respect—that help students form supportive, positive relationships.*

- *"Thriving" is about perseverance skills—including drive, efficacy, self-awareness, and self-regulation—that help students maintain the effort required to become successful.*

These skills must be nurtured in supportive environments, and afterschool and summer programs represent a valuable opportunity in this area. Successful partner organizations have the ability to provide these skill-building experiences, and their capacity stems from their flexibility in staffing, use of time, and even location. For example, through the Boston Summer Learning Project (which involves selected Boston schools and community partners), students take advantage of the city's broad array of resources, including leading universities,cultural institutions, and natural spaces.

Afterschool and summer programs activate academic content through hands-on, project-based learning. These experiences allow students to apply academic content in tangible ways and to build background knowledge they may have been lacking. They can make learning and school feel more relevant to a student, helping both students and adults answer the age-old question, Why do I have to know this? At the same time, students' interests and aspirations are stimulated by better access to the world around them, and new contexts and styles of working strengthen relationships with adults and with peers.

Collectively, afterschool and summer programs engage and motivate students, build community, and allows teachers and youth development staff to work together focused on the needs of young people. The persistent achievement gap is all too often an access gap because students and families are not sure how to easily find the resources they need. Furthermore, the variety of approaches allows schools and community organizations to test new ideas and understand what works and what needs to be adjusted. Information of this sort is valuable to policy makers, funders, school leaders, and parents.

This kind of learning happens best as part of a citywide agenda, rather than school by school or nonprofit by nonprofit. Boston's partnership agenda is driven by an approach that is student centered, standards aligned, and results focused. The Boston Public Schools and Boston After School & Beyond, an intermediary that catalyzes partnerships among schools, city agencies, community groups, and philanthropy, coordinate strategies at the district level. Funders recognize the power of collaboration, evidenced by the Boston Opportunity Agenda's commitment to summer learning as part of cradle-to-career strategy.

Other cities across America are also working to forge stronger connections and alignment among schools, afterschool, and summer learning. Interested readers should explore how the following cities are making better use of time, partnerships, and public and private funding streams:

- *The Providence After School Alliance (www.mypasa.org) and Nashville After Zone Alliance (www.naza.org), which are structuring geographic hubs of learning and development focused on middle school students*

- *The After-School Corporation (TASC) in New York City (www.tascorp. org), which is expanding the school day, drawing a variety of financial and community resources*

- *After School Matters in Chicago (www.afterschoomatters.org), which is providing high school students with apprenticeships to develop marketable skills*

- *Big Thought in Dallas (www.bigthought.org), which is making "imagination part of everyday learning" by integrating the arts with education*

What's Next?

A full decade into the 21st century, it is well understood that responsibility for educating children cannot reside with just one sector of society, especially if we are to realize our national potential on the global stage. Schools cannot do it alone—and neither can parents. Even together, schools and parents are not necessarily equipped to overcome the pernicious effects of poverty. To develop our students to their full potential, we must harness talent and resources from across multiple sectors—from schools and community organizations to businesses and institutions of higher education. But schools and community organizations cannot work in isolation. The systems must be aligned and the learning goals in schools must be reinforced at home and in the community.

As federal policy makers look to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, they should recognize that the achievement, connection, and opportunity gaps are inextricably linked. Low-income students fall behind their higher-income peers because they do not have access to the same opportunities, many of which afterschool and summer programs can provide. Also, these students often do not have regular connections to community organizations and resources that can help them learn, set goals, and develop aspirations. Public policy should promote nimble, flexible, and cost-effective approaches that help school districts work closely with community partners to address the specific needs of students in targeted ways.

As we build on more than a decade of growth and success in afterschool and summer learning, we look forward to advancing this agenda and addressing the challenges that face all of us. For example, how do we make sure there is equitable distribution of these programs? How do we ensure program quality and connect students with the opportunities that best meet their specific needs and interests? How do we ensure that they serve students who could benefit most, including English language learners and those with disabilities? How do we create sustainable and affordable partnership models?

The answers to these challenges are well within reach. Working together, school districts and their nonprofit partners are establishing citywide agendas that merge the best of afterschool and youth development with public education. Funding opportunities for strategies to expand learning and development are in short supply. That is why municipal and school district leadership must work together. Intermediaries also can play a pivotal role in leveraging and coordinating resources and organizations to link school, afterschool, and summer learning strategies.

Limited funding also means that the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program remains an essential resource, perhaps now more than ever. It is the only large-scale funding source for expanding learning afterschool and during the summer that catalyzes school-community partnerships and family engagement around a locally designed agenda of learning improvement. It is critical to realizing our vision of an integrated learning system that applies the strengths of schools and community partners—after school and during the summer—in ways that build the skills necessary for school, work, and life.

Local school, community and municipal leaders can take a number of actions to grow and improve expanded learning opportunities after school and during the summers:

- *Set community goals under which various partners can organize themselves, play to their strengths, and measure progress. In Boston, the Superintendent's Acceleration Agenda has been adopted by private funders and community partners.*

- *Establish a regular venue where coordinated strategies are devised and implemented across sectors with monitoring to ensure mutual accountability. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino appointed a Partnership Council, managed by Boston After School & Beyond, for this purpose.*

- *Build a data system that catalogues opportunities, allows parents and other caring adults to find appropriate program matches for students, and supplies information for analysis of the afterschool sector.*

- *Document the lessons learned between schools and partners, as well as across sectors, to maximize quality and build on success.*

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Supporting English Language Learners in School and in Afterschool and Summers

The number of school-age children entering U.S. schools speaking little or no English has grown exponentially in the last 10 to 15 years. From the 1997–98 school year to the 2008–09 school year, the number of English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in public schools increased from 3.5 million to 5.3 million (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). In tandem with these demographic increases, No Child Left Behind accountability measures have spotlighted significant lags in achievement of ELLs in critical academic areas, including reading and mathematics (Garcia & Frede, 2010). ELL student achievement continues to lag behind non-ELL student achievement at all socioeconomic levels, but this gap is most acute for students at the lowest socioeconomic levels (Garcia & Frede, 2010).

Understanding and closing this persistent achievement gap requires a multifaceted approach to supporting ELLs in school and beyond the school day and year. This article focuses on one promising approach: afterschool and summer learning programs specifically designed to support the linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of students who are learning English as an additional language. On balance, participation in afterschool, summer learning, and other community-based programs has been associated with improved academic achievement and improved linguistic and social development of ELLs (Tellez & Waxman, 2010; Hirsch, 2011). Moreover, helping ELL students improve their English not only supports their success in school but also can benefit all students in a school.

The body of research on the general benefits of afterschool and summer learning programs is robust and encouraging. Those students who regularly attend well-structured afterschool and/or summer learning programs demonstrate higher rates

> . . . participation in afterschool, summer learning, and other community-based programs has been associated with improved academic achievement and improved linguistic and social development of ELLs.

of attendance in school, have fewer discipline referrals, are more prepared for the academic rigors of school, and demonstrate increased achievement in core academic areas such as mathematics, science, reading, and language arts (Martin, et al., 2007; Farmer-Hinton, Sass, & Schroeder, 2009; Huang & Cho, 2009).

Generally, afterschool and summer learning programs are most successful when they are structured to offer (1) homework support, including specific study skills and motivational strategies structured to complement the school curriculum; (2) staff members who share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as the students; and (3) constructive ways to include parents and other family members in the program (Huang & Cho, 2009; Wong, 2010; David, 2011; Rodriguez-Valls, 2011). When serving ELLs, each of these features must be designed to boost the English language development of students, a complex process that is inherently social and best developed through varied and authentic learning opportunities. Authentic learning opportunities consist of activities that intrinsically motivate students to learn and are directly tied to students' linguistic and cultural background and interests (Weisburd, 2008; Wong, 2010; Rodriguez-Valls, 2011). Each of the above aspects of successful afterschool and summer learning programs is described below, specifically with regard to implications for serving ELLs.

Homework Support

Afterschool and summer learning programs can help students negotiate the complicated task of keeping up with grade-level academic content while concurrently developing their English proficiency, thus reducing the gaps in academic achievement between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers. The strongest programs complement and extend school activities and programs. School curricula, however, are bound by district or state-level mandates that often impose isolated learning tasks and tight time constraints. Curricula for afterschool and summer learning programs serving ELLs should include a greater number of project-based learning activities and greater amounts of time to focus on the activities. These projects are more personally meaningful to ELL students and offer opportunities for authentic uses of language and support of students' culture. As Hirsh (2011) reports, such activities and projects allow "positive aspects of youth culture to flourish," including "strong relationships, spontaneity, creativity, expressiveness, engagement with music, knowing how to have fun, and idealism."

Students, teachers, and administrators alike recognize the value of high quality afterschool and summer learning programs. Litke (2009) surveyed and interviewed culturally and linguistically diverse students who attended afterschool programs and found that the students placed great value on having the extra time after school to complete homework assignments, work one-on-one with teachers, engage in a structured review of homework, and review for tests.

Quality Staff With Connections to the Community

Afterschool and summer learning programs have been shown to promote positive relationships among students, school personnel, and members of the community (Anderson-Butcher, 2010). For example, the highly acclaimed program in Los Angeles, LA's BEST, intentionally recruits instructional staff from the school neighborhood. Students relate more with mentors from their neighborhood because they share the same or similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. LA's BEST has demonstrated long-term positive effects on attendance, academic achievement, and lowered drop-out rates in high school (Huang & Cho, 2009; Anderson-Butcher, 2010; Sanger, 2011).

Programs in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York also staff programs with adults from the same or similar neighborhoods who share students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These staff members help students cope with stressors that are part of the shared experience of living in the same community. They also help young people develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to navigate the complexities of society (Farmer-Hinton, et al., 2009; Wong, 2010; Hirsch, 2011; Sanger, 2011). One positive consequence of recruiting staff directly from the school's surrounding community is that the afterschool/summer learning staff members often develop long-term careers in education and fill critical administrative and instructional roles within the school. As a result, the faculty and administrative pools more accurately reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students they serve (Sanger, 2011), helping all students broaden their learning opportunities and experiences.

Connections With Parents

Well-designed afterschool and summer learning programs can assist immigrant families in navigating complex U.S. school structures through culturally relevant understandings of the community (Wong, 2010). These understandings are critical to developing a "funds-of-knowledge" approach in which the cultural and linguistic strengths that students and their families bring to the learning environment are recognized and supported. Such afterschool programs allow for language-rich educational opportunities and authentic learning activities that enhance the instruction provided during the regular school day.

Rodriguez-Valls (2011) found positive parent partnerships in an afterschool cooperative in which parents and their children practiced reading strategies together as they read books in Spanish and English. Participants (including parents and children alike) became keenly aware of how they could leverage their Spanish literacy skills to develop their knowledge of English, realizing that "their knowledge in both languages was an asset to reading their world with biliterate eyes." Building parents' English skills helps both them and their children be more successful.

In addition, afterschool programs can be deliberately constructed to pass along to children a connection to their heritage culture and language by providing a place for children to share their ethnic values, identity, and friendships. Such programs are designed to teach students more about their native language, relying on parental and community support, along with appropriate teaching methodology and materials, to help children become bilingual in their heritage language and English. Siegal (2004) examines such a program in Arizona in which Japanese parents started an afterschool program, assisted in staffing the program, and created the curriculum to ensure that their children maintain the language and traditions of Japan. In a global economy, knowing English and another language or two is a tremendous asset for Americans of all backgrounds.

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Recommendations and Conclusion

Afterschool and summer learning programs are playing a larger and more significant role in addressing the academic, linguistic, and social needs of ELL children and their families. If the programs are designed and staffed by members of the community that reflect children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds and that complement the school curriculum, the likely result will be gains in ELL academic achievement.

The most effective programs leverage ELL students' bilingual abilities, while assisting with homework, recruiting staff from the local community, and engaging parents. Since English language acquisition is an active process requiring frequent, purposeful interaction with English content, the most useful afterschool activities will be meaningful and closely tied to real objects and enterprises in the students' world to provide a concrete context for words and ideas. To the extent possible, activities and support should be provided to bridge the students' primary language, while simultaneously giving students authentic opportunities and encouragement to practice responding in English. In addition, program leaders should vary the style and medium of communication whenever possible. Spoken directions should also be written, for example, and gestures should accompany oral language. Students will more likely engage in these activities that take into account their previous cognitive, social, and cultural and linguistic experiences.

For More Information

The following websites offer resources for developing effective afterschool and summer learning programs targeting the needs of English language learners.

Afterschool Alliance gathers and disseminates information about effective afterschool programs. Articles range from general recommendations to summations of current research describing how programs can support ELLs. For articles related to English learners, see http://www. afterschoolalliance.org/issue_49_ELLs.cfm

Center for Applied Linguistics provides a comprehensive range of research-based information, tools, and resources related to language acquisition and culture. http://www.cal.org/

Institute of Educational Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse reports on empirically validated practices that support the literacy of English language learners. Their website provides a helpful, cohesive guide entitled "Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades." http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/findwhatworks.aspx

National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition provides many resources for ELL teachers and program administrators including resources for parents (written in six languages), resources for program developers, synopses of useful teaching strategies, and other useful guides. http://www.ncela.gwu.edu

A Snapshot of Programs Supporting English Language Learners

- *Community Lodgings in Alexandria, Virginia, serves homeless and low-income families by providing transitional housing as well as career counseling and budget mentoring for parents. Their Youth Education Program, funded through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, provides academic assistance, a safe alternative for gang influence, and a focus on avoidance of at-risk behaviors. Community Lodgings serves a population that is entirely low-income and 82% Latino, including many ELLs. Middle school students in the program for 2 years or more passed their and English SOL tests by a rate 10% higher than their Hispanic peers.*

- *Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) in Washington, DC, serves a predominantly Latino population, including many ELL students. LAYC's varied multilingual afterschool program offerings include educational enhancement, social services, workforce investment, art and media, as well as advocacy. In the 2008–09 school year, 58% of elementary students receiving regular tutoring through LAYC's Americorps partnership increased either their language arts or math grade by a full letter grade over the course of the year; and 31% increased both math and language arts grades by a full letter grade.*

- *Montana Migrant Education Program in Helena, Montana, serves children of migrant workers who have changed school districts within the past 3 years to accommodate a parent seeking temporary or seasonal employment; 70% of its participants are ELLs. Montana Migrant Education Program focuses on academic achievement and self-esteem building for students who are disadvantaged in education by language barriers, poverty, and a migratory lifestyle. During its 2010 summer program, 79% of participants improved in reading by an average of 11%, and 99% of participants improved in math by an average of 20%.*

- *The CORAL Program in California is intentionally structured to create strong relationships among students and between students and staff. Staff members are often young adults who share a cultural and linguistic background with the students, and they often capitalize on that connection to create multicultural, multilingual learning opportunities. Staff members also use their knowledge of students' languages and cultures to create high quality literacy lessons that provide students an opportunity to share their own experiences, family backgrounds, languages, and cultures and to deepen their understanding of, and connection to, a variety of cultures. English learners participating in CORAL achieve academic gains in equal measure to other children in the program—suggesting that CORAL offers a promising approach to strengthening literacy skills in the afterschool hours.*

Reference: Afterschool Alliance: Issue Brief #49: *English Language Learners: Becoming Fluent in Afterschool* (2011)

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Providing Access to Training and Resources to Afterschool and Summer Learning Professionals to Promote Full and Meaningful Inclusion for All Children

A growing number of parents of children with disabilities, as well as the regular classroom teachers who work with their children, are recognizing the value of including these children in afterschool and summer learning programs. Such programs often provide more natural environments where children with disabilities can experience joyful learning and develop genuine friendships with same age peers without disabilities.

While there is not yet nearly enough access to summer and afterschool programs for children with disabilities, programs that provide expanded learning opportunities are reporting notable increases in the enrollment of children who require some type of accommodation or support. As a result, the need has never been greater for afterschool and youth development professionals to have access to resources that will support them in successfully welcoming and making accommodations for students with disabilities or special needs, including those with learning differences or those who exhibit challenging behaviors.

Extensive research has been conducted on the benefits of training afterschool and summer learning providers. The relationship between high quality professional development and child and youth success in programs that extend beyond the school day has been well documented in the literature (Bouffard & Little, 2004).

With 15 years of providing support to afterschool and summer programs, Kids Included Together (KIT)—a national nonprofit organization—has witnessed major cultural transformations in afterschool and summer learning programs when staff begin to recognize and acknowledge the value of inclusive programs. The process for staff is often described as a journey: The first step involves adopting a philosophy of inclusion

followed by learning the skills and best practices to include all children meaningfully. By receiving high-quality professional development on inclusion and accommodations, staff will better the lives of children, families, and programs, and they will even see a positive change in their own lives. It is vital, however, that the training and resources are research based and validated to ensure that caregivers are receiving the most effective professional development possible.

KIT has recently conducted a series of efficacy and validity studies to generate evidence that its training and resources lead to the full and meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities in out-of-school-time programs. It was KIT's expectation that validating its services and strategies would help promote their implementation throughout the country and overseas, with an eye towards allowing more children of *all* abilities to be fully included in expanded learning programs worldwide. These studies found that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between KIT's partnership with an organization and the beliefs, attitudes, practices, policies, and relationships with families within those organizations (Smith, 2011).

In a large-scale needs assessment, KIT collected data from caregivers in expanded learning programs in four different regions of the country. After an analysis of the data, a number of themes emerged. KIT established that, in general, caregivers did not feel prepared to include children with disabilities, they were unsure what types of accommodations to utilize in the program, and they were unsure how to communicate with parents and families about challenges their children were having in the program. After 1 year of participating in KIT training and utilizing KIT, however, providers reported that they felt more comfortable including children with disabilities, felt more supported when including children of all abilities, were more likely to partner with families to ensure the success of their children, and were implementing accommodations in the program on a daily basis (Smith, 2011).

> Providers reported that they felt more comfortable including children with disabilities, felt more supported when including children of all abilities, were more likely to partner with families to ensure the success of their children, and were implementing accommodations in the program on a daily basis (Smith, 2011).

Unfortunately, the same barriers that exist in the delivery of traditional in-school professional development also exist in the expanded learning field, including restricted budgets, a lack of necessary resources, time and geographical constraints, and inflexibility in caregivers' demanding schedules. To ensure that all caregivers have access to training, KIT has developed a program to combat those barriers. KIT has adopted a blended learning style that allows caregivers to access training at a time and in a way that is most appropriate for them.

Studying in more depth the KIT delivery system can provide strong clues for afterschool and summer learning intermediaries and professional development providers regarding the range of learning opportunities and supports needed to improve professional practices. KIT delivers research-based professional development through face-to-face training, eLearning modules, webinars, print materials, KIT Support Center phone calls and e-mails, and one-on-one assistance. When participants complete live trainings, eLearning modules, or webinars, they are eligible to receive continuing education units (CEUs). KIT's National Training Center on Inclusion is an authorized provider of CEUs through the International Association for Continuing Education and Training.

KIT trainers travel both domestically and overseas to deliver 2-hour face-to-face trainings to afterschool and summer learning staff. Prior to the visit, an inclusion specialist discusses the needs of the program with a director and determines the training that will best meet the needs of the staff. Trainings are interactive, include a great deal of movement, and allow for collaboration between participants.

KIT also offers training modules through interactive, self-paced online modules that are designed to take about 30 minutes to complete. KIT tracks participant progress on the eLearning modules and provides certificates for completion of the "Opening Doors to Inclusive Programs" series. Completers can, in addition, receive CEUs for the successful completion of the four core modules.

Research has revealed that the benefits of KIT's training and resources extend well beyond the expanded learning program itself (Smith, 2011). For example, communication is a key component of all of KIT's professional development. Caregivers are provided training on communicating with parents, teachers in the child's school, and other caregivers that work with the child. One communications tool that has been found to be effective is a "Communication Journal for Parents and Providers." This tool is designed to facilitate communication between program staff and parents of children with disabilities who exhibit challenging behavior. Caregivers implement accommodations for a specific child in the program; when the accommodation is found to be successful, the provider documents it in the communication journal and sends it home to share with parents. The journal supports consistency, celebrates successes, and encourages collaboration and trust between the home and the caregivers.

In presenting at more than 20 state afterschool and 21st Century Community Learning Centers conferences, KIT has often been the only organization providing assistance and support for inclusion and accommodation. While KIT welcomes more organizations working in this important area, we are also pleased with comments from afterschool providers who have participated in our training. The following comments help frame how providers have found KIT's training to be helpful.

From a staff member from a large provider that runs 21st Century Community Learning Centers in San Diego County, as well as other afterschool and summer learning programs:

After I attended a KIT training this summer, I realized that you have to be willing to accommodate every child with a positive attitude. Taking the time to know the children and know what the children like to do and incorporating it in the program can make them feel connected.

From another staff member from the same San Diego provider:

KIT trainings over the summer helped me understand that accommodations such as visual rest spots in the classroom can improve the outcome of behavior in some of my students, I like that all the information is applicable to my work area and I truly learn and enjoy KIT trainings.

From the director of United Youth Theater in Hartford, Connecticut:

There are so many misconceptions around disabilities, and too many people approach inclusion with a formulaic, often misguided, approach to this is how things "should" be done. KIT and NTCI help partners move away from those things. They not only "get inclusion" but they understand the behaviors, strategies, and best practices that can help their partners make inclusion a reality.

The most regularly noted benefit of KIT's training and resources, however, are the clear, easily communicated recommendations for accommodations in the expanded learning time environments, whether classrooms, stages, or outdoor spaces. Commonly suggested recommendations for including all children in the program include the following: The most regularly noted benefit of KIT's training and resources, however, are the clear, easily communicated recommendations for accommodations in the expanded learning time environments, whether classrooms, stages, or outdoor spaces. Commonly suggested recommendations for including all children in the program include the following:

- *Staff should become more intentional and skilled observers by documenting what environmental influences impact a child's learning or behavior, e.g., ratios, the physical, sensory and/or social-emotional environment.*

- *Staff should ensure attention to transitions and use appropriate tools to support transitions, as well as provide visual supports to increase comprehension and processing.*

- *Staff should be intentional and clear about behavioral expectations for children with challenges; however, they also should consistently and descriptively reinforce appropriate behaviors every time a child complies with direction or a staff request.*

- *Rather than assign a single, dedicated staff member to support a child with special needs, KIT recommends that staff who are inclusion facilitators design accommodations that will naturally include several other staff peers, thereby changing staff-to-child ratios, as well as modeling respectful interactions between children with and without disabilities.*

- *That said, program staff and leadership should also be cognizant of shifting caregivers throughout the day, particularly in a summer learning program. This limits consistency and predictability, which can be particularly difficult on young children or youth who might be more emotionally vulnerable.*

Conclusion

Providing training and resources to program staff ensures that children with and without disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in expanded learning and recreational opportunities. Although there is a great deal of support for children with disabilities during the school day, similar supports should be available in the expanded learning field so that this group of children can take advantages of the benefits of afterschool and summer learning and enrichment opportunities. It is imperative, therefore, that afterschool and summer programs both reach out to include children with disabilities and provide the professional development for their staff to make these essential learning opportunities engaging and effective for all children and youth.

The professional development experiences offered by KIT have generated overwhelmingly positive responses from afterschool and summer learning professionals who have participated. With the new empirical evidence validating the efficacy of KIT's training and resources (Smith, 2011), it is imperative that KIT and others like them disseminate resources and communicate trainings to afterschool and summer learning programs across the nation. By arming all caregivers with the tools necessary to fully and meaningfully include children with disabilities, the field can ensure that all children have the opportunity to benefit from expanded learning opportunities in their communities.

For More Information

Additional information and recommendations on including children with disabilities can be found at www.kitonline.org. You will also gain access to KIT's eLearning modules, online instructional videos, sessions from KIT's National Training Center on Inclusion, and a variety of other resources.

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