



This article is one of more than 40 in an upcoming Compendium on the opportunities and potential of expanded learning opportunities and the importance of afterschool and summer programs, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers. With support from the C. S. Mott Foundation and under the leadership of executive editor Terry K. Peterson, PhD, the Compendium comprises eight sections with articles authored by thought leaders, policy officials, researchers, practitioners and other professionals in the field. Articles from the Compendium are available for download from the new website **Expanded Learning & Afterschool: Opportunities for Student Success** at www.expandinglearning.org

Supporting English Language Learners: In-School, Afterschool and Summer

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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 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."

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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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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)



Recommendations & 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.



Web Resources

For more information about developing an effective afterschool and summer learning programs targeting the needs of English language learners see the following websites:

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>



Resources

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