



Expanding
minds
and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

Gene R. Carter

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The Importance of Educating and Developing Many Aspects of the “Whole” Child

Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are?

We should say to each of them: do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you...

You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel.

- Pablo Casals

Imagine a conversation about learning. In many places and situations the conversation would quickly change from “learning” to “achievement on standardized tests.” In others, it would shift from learning to teaching. But in far too few cases would it remain on “learning”—the one concept that specifically and unequivocally draws our thoughts to the child as he or she exists now and as he or she will exist in the future. To be clear, achievement is not the same as learning. And, as an educator willing to tell the truth will admit, neither is teaching.

Learning is what prepares young people for meaningful citizenship, employment, postsecondary education, and active participation in a global society. It is developmental and experiential. It is not restricted to time or space, adult qualification or status, intent or accident. Learning is the only thing that matters. And children do learn. The question we must ask ourselves is whether they learn that which we believe will help them succeed.

At ASCD, we believe, and decades of research confirm, that certain conditions maximize children's opportunity to learn. We have committed through our Whole Child Initiative to ensuring that each child, in each school, in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Joined by more than 60 partners across the spectrum of education associations, recreation and health organizations, arts, history, civics, and other content-based nonprofits in the United States and beyond, we have called on educators, families, community organizations, and policy makers to change the conversation from one of "schooling" to one of "learning" and to take definitive action to realize a vision for the whole child that currently only exists on paper.

We seek nothing less than to revolutionize the way children learn. This means during the typical school day, as well as by including engaging expanded learning opportunities in afterschool, weekends, and summers as part of that equation, especially for struggling students.

For too long, in too many schools, young people have been provided a learning experience that so undermotivates, undereducates, underprepares, and underincludes that they are left reaching for remedial preparation for the careers, further education, and civic participation they seek. In the worst situations, young people are neither healthy nor safe, neither engaged nor supported, and certainly not challenged.

In others, schools with seemingly healthy school cultures (little bullying, supportive staff-student relationships, wraparound supports for families, etc.) fail to hold high expectations for each child and instead create an environment of academic pity that fails to prepare even graduates for meaningful career, college, and civic next steps. In still others, the emphasis on academic rigor, rote memorization, and test preparation is so disproportionate that students experience high levels of social-emotional stress. This leads to a disconnection from school and the community and creates boredom in a culture of repetition from school that can extend into afterschool, weekend, and summer activities if we do not design and deliver expanded learning opportunities so they are more engaging, more personalized, more enriching, and include school-community collaboration and family involvement. Rather than a broadening of learning, more of the same only longer will leave increasing numbers of young people unprepared for anything beyond the world of multiple-choice exams. We can and must do better both

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during the regular school day as well as in quality expanded learning programs after school and during the summer, which are typically less hampered by too much of the educational system's "red tape" that regulates the typical day and year.

In the current system, of course, children learn. They learn that only some kinds of kids make it. They learn that art and physical education are "special." They learn that creativity is for free time. They learn that information, skills, interests, and opinions are irrelevant if they are not on the test and that scores define their worth. This needs to change during the regular school day if we are to be successful, but afterschool and summer programs through school-community partnerships can also be a good source of arts and creative learning, physical fitness and health, engagement in hands-on science, learning about the world, using digital learning to expand horizons—all building on and expanding the school day and the very essence of learning.

While the United States continues to pursue a regimen of "if at first you don't succeed, do the same thing longer or fire everyone involved" thinking, the rest of the world seeks opportunities to stimulate creativity, critical thinking, content application, and joy in the learning process. They intentionally and strategically move away from the standardized testing that serves as the North Star of the U.S. system of educational reform and find new options to provide seamless experiences from home to school to after school to work to life.

What if we closed the believing-doing gap that leads us to believe that each child should be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, while we simultaneously pursue actions that defeat exactly that purpose? What if, instead, each child entered school healthy and learned about and practiced a healthy lifestyle? What if each child learned in an environment that was physically and emotionally safe for children and adults? What if broad learning, and not narrow multiple-choice tests, allowed her to be actively engaged in learning—in school, after school, on weekends, and during breaks—that connected her both to school and to the community? What if he had access to personalized learning unbound by time and space, supported by qualified, caring adults? What if they all were challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further education and for employment and participation in a global economy? What if the flexibility of afterschool, weekend, and summer programs were leveraged to directly connect more young people, particularly those who are struggling, to see and experience careers and learn about college?

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We can make this vision of a system focused on learning the reality for each child. Together we can eliminate the barriers of time, money, geography, role, and expertise to ensure that each child is healthy so that she may learn in pace with her development. By expanding learning opportunities after school and in summers, we can ensure that each child is safe—academically, emotionally, and physically—so that he may participate in active, authentic, experiential learning opportunities. We can engage students in aligned learning from content area to content area, learning venue to learning venue that reflects their interests and opinions and connects them in meaningful ways to the communities in which they live. We can surround children with adults in a variety of school and community-based roles who conscientiously and consciously attend to the model they provide, the relationship they foster, and the expectations they hold. We can change the conversation from schooling to learning and challenge the very definition of success by raising the bar of performance for ourselves as educators, organizations, and citizens.

Now is the time to move toward the leading edge of learning in expanded opportunities afterschool, summers, weekends and through school-community partnerships. I invite you to leap; to take bold action; to revolutionize the way you learn, teach, and lead so that each child among us learns each day that he or she is a marvel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gene R. Carter is a veteran educator with experience as a private and public school teacher, public school administrator, superintendent of schools, and university professor. He is active in community, business, and civic organizations. He assumed his position of executive director and CEO of ASCD (formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) in 1992.