



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

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

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

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

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

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

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

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

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Business Leaders: Expanding Afterschool and Summer Learning Opportunities Can Make a Bottom Line Difference

For a number of years, business leaders have voiced concern over the future workforce, citing that many young people entering the workforce are ill equipped. Leaders say students need stronger social, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, as well as more opportunities to learn and explore in a hands-on setting.

Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance, sat down with several business leaders who serve on the Afterschool Alliance Board of Directors to gain a better understanding of their perspectives, and to discuss how afterschool programs can help.

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A new study is issued every couple weeks that raises alarm over our future workforce. Often cited is the need for stronger communication, teamwork, leadership and critical thinking skills, as well as more science, technology, engineering, and math students. What is the most important skill set tomorrow's workforce needs, and are we doing enough to develop those skills?

Reinaldo Llano: I've seen the reports, and they ring true. One of the reasons our company, Bright House Networks, and the cable industry more broadly, are so supportive of afterschool programs is that we know they can help our workforce pipeline. We need employees with a broad range of skills, from excellent social and communications skills for customer service and sales to highly skilled technicians who can continually develop as new products are introduced to the market.

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Joan Higginbotham: Academics are paramount; but they are not sufficient without social, communication, and critical thinking skills.

We are in a different place than my parents were; the workplace is highly technical. Employees need to think about what is happening and make real-time decisions that require a lot of thought. The ability to get along in a team setting is also essential for success.

Lisa Lucheta: From a purely business perspective, the skills required of our future workforce are different from those of even the recent past. In this highly technical, connected world, critical problem solving, collaboration, and innovative thinking will be key skills. Afterschool programs are essential in delivering content that support development of these skills.

Higginbotham: Afterschool helps in all of these arenas. Not only do students get academic enrichment, they build social skills in group settings, thus, self-confidence and self-esteem, which are critical to self-development.

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What is so special about the kinds of experiences afterschool programs provide?

Lucheta: Opportunities for creative development and self-expression have been minimized or eliminated in the regular school day for many children. Afterschool programs place a priority on creative youth development. They play a critical role in sparking interest in learning for kids, helping to keep kids in school and on a path to graduation.

In an afterschool program, kids might work together to build a community garden or develop a music video; in doing so, they must lead, negotiate, plan, and communicate. And all the while they are learning, being expressive, and creating something of value.

Llano: Afterschool programs are great at exposing students to career paths. Kids have the chance to develop informal, friendly relationships with experts and professionals and really get their hands around a subject matter. An engineer may help them build robots, or a visiting artist may design a mural with them.

Afterschool programs incorporate incredible hands-on projects that make intimidating subjects like science and technology exciting and appealing. We desperately need more young people to engage in these subjects, and to pursue tech careers.

Higginbotham: Afterschool programs provide exposure. For a lot of youth, that is all they need... You can't do something if you don't know it exists.

This is particularly true in underserved communities. These kids might not have the same opportunities as other kids. An internship in an office, or a visit to a real science lab, may be their first experience of a professional setting. It can provide a whole new view of the world and unlock their own potential.

We must ensure these children have exposure to the experiences that quality afterschool programs offer. It can provide the impetus for kids to strive to do something with their lives.

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From a business standpoint, what will be the impact on our nation if we don't ensure all kids have access to these kinds of experiences?

Higginbotham: If we don't start taking the need to develop these skills seriously, we'll have to import a skilled workforce. The quality of education has declined, and many of our students in the U.S. are not competing on the same level with their peers across the ocean.

We are missing an enormous opportunity to cultivate this generation of students, and that concerns me on several levels. From a business standpoint, who is going to run our future businesses? From a personal standpoint, how are our young people going to fend for themselves as adults in an ever-increasing competitive global market?

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You sound pretty passionate about this. Why is this issue important to you?

Higginbotham: I had the sort of experience we're talking about as a kid, in a program called Inroads, and it had a tremendous impact on me and my career.

I was good with math and science, but I did not know what to do with my skills until I took part in Inroads. The program showed me what I could do with math and science in the real world ... and led me to pursue a career in engineering and then to become an astronaut.

Llano: My whole life is shaped by my afterschool experience. I was at a critical point in high school. I had really disconnected from school, had stopped going to class and started to fail, when a counselor suggested I take part in an afterschool program.

In the program, we received college and career counseling and went on college field trips. More importantly, someone inspired me to do my best. Our rapport with the afterschool staff was different than any I had ever had with an adult or educator.

I will never forget visiting the family of one of the afterschool staffers. It was my first visit to a community outside of my experience. She had gone to Wellesley and her family lived in an upscale neighborhood in Massachusetts. They were my first Latino role models; they gave me something to strive to become. I thought, "I want a house like this, a neighborhood like this."

She also sacrificed to run our afterschool program. She could have worked anywhere, making much more money. That put a personal onus on us to be the best we could be; we felt accountable to her and ourselves.

My whole life is shaped by my afterschool experience.

It was the afterschool program that connected me back into school, inspired me to get involved, to meet people and make friends.

Lucheta: I've seen the "spark" that afterschool programs can ignite firsthand, through our work with local programs. From "teaching" science and art classes at our local Northern San Mateo County Boys and Girls Club to sponsoring an 8-week art class in a San Francisco Beacon program to interacting with our nationwide afterschool label contest winners, it is clear to me that the engagement, potential for learning and social interaction present in these programs provide tremendous opportunities for these children to be more successful in school and in their lives.

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Lisa, tell us more about Torani's work to support afterschool programs. Why have you made afterschool programs a focus of your charitable work?

Lucheta: For Torani, being in business is more than just doing business. It's about the positive impact we make in our communities. It's also about adding creativity to people's lives.

Since 1925, Torani has made ingredients that go into flavorful and creative beverages worldwide. Our flavoring syrups, sauces, and other beverage products are synonymous with creativity and invention. Our interest in creative expression led us to focus our activities on youth in our communities and their access to creative expression.

For the last 9 years, Torani has conducted our "Art for Kids" label contest in afterschool programs nationwide. The afterschool students' winning artwork is displayed around the world on bottles of our Torani syrup. Torani donates 5% of the sales of these syrups to the Afterschool Alliance.

It's very gratifying for us to know we are promoting the artistic talents of children through our contest and, that through this program, we are making a financial contribution to quality afterschool programs.

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What has been the impact on your business?

Lucheta: We have begun to incorporate our community efforts around afterschool into our work with our value chain partners. One example of this was Torani's "Our Café Gives Back" program in Seattle. We engaged our café partners in the area by creating Torani beverages whose sales would benefit the local afterschool program of their choice. It was a good way for our customers to engage their customers in an effort that would directly benefit their community.

The Art for Kids program has also been wonderful in nurturing employee morale and the collaborative team approach that is part of our culture at Torani. Our entire team votes on the artwork to be selected for the labels each year in April. Team members are delighted to present awards to the winning students, bring them Torani syrup with their own labels, and host an Italian soda and pizza party for their programs. It helps us all to be closely aligned with our vision and values, to benefit from each others' thinking, and to spur growth and innovation. The program resonates with our team members.

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Reinaldo, Bright House Networks has also created a company-wide afterschool initiative, supporting efforts to expand programs nationally and donating more than \$1 million to local afterschool programs. What led Bright House Networks to invest in afterschool?

Llano: We have our customers to thank for guiding us toward investing in afterschool. In 2005, we conducted consumer research to better understand the issues our customers cared about and where they thought we could best make an impact. Our customers told us loud and clear that afterschool programs were important to them, and they felt Bright House Networks could help.

We have a relationship with our customers; they allow us in their homes to provide cable service. Our afterschool investments allow us to give back and get involved in our communities in a personal way.

We provide financial support to key organizations in our service areas, such as Boys & Girls Clubs, Police Athletic Leagues, YMCAs, and smaller afterschool providers. We also offer free high speed Internet for computer labs, video services, and equipment that give kids access to technology and information. Nationally we are a champion for the Afterschool Alliance and their phenomenal work to expand and improve afterschool programs to the millions of young people and their families who really need and want them.

The unique nature of afterschool programs—the variety of partnerships and partners, the quality of programming, the creativity and flexibility of the space—makes it a really great fit for us to put our resources to use for the community.

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What has been the impact on your business?

Llano: People have a more positive view of our company since we began investing in afterschool programs. We have great stories to tell about the impact we are making—and even better, we have made meaningful connections in the communities we serve. We have seen kids' lives changing.

Supporting afterschool programs has helped differentiate us in a positive way to our customers.

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Do any of you have any final words of advice or recommendations to offer?

Lucheta: Our collective passion for and commitment to high quality afterschool experiences is evident. Business leaders, whether they are heads of large corporations in the nation's biggest cities or they run small businesses anywhere in this great nation, should weigh in to ensure that quality afterschool programs are well supported and are available and accessible to all children in every community across America. It is in the business interest to strengthen the 21st Century Community Learning Centers to make sure they include school-community partnerships and engaged learning that broadens our young people's skills. We need to do more to support and build local afterschool and summer learning partnerships in neighborhoods that don't have them, but need them. It's nothing short of a national imperative in order to ensure that America remains competitive and maintains its leadership in our global economy.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

Jodi Grant has served since 2005 as executive director of the Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality, affordable afterschool programs. Previously, she served as director of Work and Family Programs with the National Partnership for Women and Families. Grant has also worked on Capitol Hill in various Senate staff positions.

Joan Higginbotham is director of community relations for Lowe's, Inc. An engineer and a former NASA astronaut, she flew aboard Space Shuttle Discovery mission STS-116 as a mission specialist. Higginbotham is the third African American woman to go into space. She has a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Southern Illinois University and two master's degrees—one in management and one in space systems—from Florida Institute of Technology. She has earned many varied awards, from the Commendation of Merit for Service to the Department of Defense to the Presidential Sports Award in bicycling and weight training. She joined the board of the Afterschool Alliance in 2010.

Reinaldo Llano is director of community relations for Bright House Networks, the nation's 6th largest owner and operator of cable systems, serving 2.4 million customers. He is responsible for a multi-million dollar charitable giving and community outreach program. Llano has served on the Afterschool Alliance board since 2007 and is actively engaged in a number of other community and youth-serving organizations. He is a proud graduate of afterschool programs, which he credits with helping him stay in school and launch a successful career.

Lisa Lucheta is principal and owner of Torani, a company that produces flavoring syrups, sauces, and blended drink bases. Started in 1925 by her grandparents Rinaldo and Ezilda Torani, the company currently engages over 100 employees. Torani products are made in South San Francisco, California, and are distributed in more than 40 countries. Vice-chair of the Afterschool Alliance board, Lucheta has served on the organization's board since 2007.