



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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School and Public Libraries: Enriching Student Learning and Empowering Student Voices Through Expanded Learning Opportunities

I Am

by Brother Poet

I speak therefore I think,
I think therefore I am,
Being of existence, I am a voice,
A voice in this world that should be heard,
Outspoken yet underspoken,
I have much to say, but nothing to say at all.

- *Reading for Their Life* by Alfred W. Tatum (2009)

Our society may have no greater obligation than to ensure that every young person develops the academic, social, and personal attitudes and capacities that will lead to a fulfilling and successful life. Youth follow a journey first to discover and then to develop their own talents, interests, preferences, and personal voice. For some, the path to developing their unique capacities and establishing their distinctive identities and voices is paved with multiple opportunities to read, explore, experience, and pursue interests during the out-of-school-time hours. For others, their voices are stifled by limited access to books, trips, learning experiences, and technology. This lack of access can have dire consequences, leaving our youth with restricted voices and “nothing to say at all.”

The lack of access is most pervasive for our young people during out-of-school-time hours. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992) reported that young people have an average minimum of 1,900 hours of time out of school every year that can be filled by activities of their choice. Libraries, both public and school, have an important role in empowering student learning and voices through expanded learning opportunities after school and during the summer.

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What does the research say about libraries and expanded learning time?

A major goal of libraries has always been literacy for all people (Lyman, 1977). The impact of participation in library programs and services during afterschool, weekends, and summers is significant. Instead of spending their summer with no books to read, disadvantaged youth who have access to libraries have increased access to books; research has shown that youth who have greater access to books read more (Krashen, 2004). The more that young people read, the better they read (Krashen, 2009). A research study in California found that the number of hours that the school library was open was significantly related to test scores at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Achterman, 2008). A Massachusetts study found that students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels who have access to afterschool hours in their school library exhibit higher achievement on the state test (Baughman, 2000). In Missouri, research determined that summer reading participation was significantly correlated with achievement on the state test (Quantitative Resources, 2008).

Expanded learning literacy experiences are particularly important in providing equitable opportunities for learning and reading for disadvantaged youth to prevent the summer slide when, on average, students lose up to one month of instruction, and disadvantaged students lose even more (Cooper et al., 1996). A research brief published by the New York State Library summarizes the critical importance of libraries' providing rich reading experiences for disadvantaged youth after school and during the summer: "Differences in out-of-school access to books, positive reading practices, and connections with institutions supportive of self-discovery and reading, account for much of the disparity in student academic success" (Balsen & Moore, 2011, p. 2). Two-thirds of the reading achievement gap for ninth graders can be traced to "unequal access to summer learning opportunities" (Balsen & Moore, 2011, p. 1).

Afterschool, weekend, and summer programming in libraries has positive impacts on communities as well as young people. Many public and school libraries engage the parents in their children's literacy development through family literacy or parent education programs, including providing parent guides, modeling read-alouds and lapsits¹, helping parents with their own literacy needs, and guiding them in the selection of books for their children (Dowd, 1997; Cerny, 2000; Kupetz, 1993). Libraries can build their community focus by promoting public discussions (Weibel, 1992), using cooperative and creative play to foster the sharing of cultural practices (Neuman, 1994), and supporting parents who speak a language other than English at home or who have low literacy levels (Celano & Newman, 2001).

1. Lapsits are expressive reading and conversation with a child nestled in a lap.

A powerful draw for youth to participate in expanded learning time activities at the library is access to technology. Research has found that higher income children benefit more from access to technology than lower-income children because lower income children are less likely to have strong parental guidance in modeling the use of the computer and, therefore, often resort to simply playing games (Forum for Youth Investment, 2005). The guiding support of a librarian enables all young people to have successful technological experiences.

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What can we learn from examples of library expanded learning time programming?

Some libraries maintain expanded learning programming independently, such as the LEAP afterschool program of the Free Library of Philadelphia that is designed to serve low-income youth from 6 to 18 years of age. This is a full-bodied program that includes homework help, access to technology, cultural and educational programming, and even career development activities (Forum for Youth Investment, 2005). The Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore has designed a youth program of community service in which students are trained to work as interns in library branches and learn to conduct library programs for children and youth (Forum for Youth Investment, 2005). Other libraries (both public and school) provide expanded learning programming to youth through partnerships with various community agencies and afterschool and summer programs.

The Phoenix Public Library's Teen Central program, for example, partners with a number of city agencies and businesses to provide social support (e.g., a teen hotline) and training in film editing and financial literacy (Forum for Youth Investment, 2005). The After School Matters (ASM) program in Chicago is the result of a partnership among the City of Chicago, the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District, and the Chicago Public Library. In 2005, this program operated in more than one-fourth of the city's high schools, offering paid apprenticeships, career exposure, arts, educational enrichment, and a drop-in center (Forum for Youth Investment, 2005). The J. Lewis Crozer Public Library in Chester, Pennsylvania, partners with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers afterschool and summer programs at Chester Community Charter School to sponsor activities throughout the year designed to foster a love of books in children and families (<http://www.chestercommunitycharter.org/21st-century-community-learning-centers-21st-cclc-program>).

A third approach that libraries have taken to provide expanded learning opportunities is to focus on outreach, especially to the teen community. The Tucson-Pima Public Library has created Teen Centers, offering technology training and career development opportunities, and giving young people the chance to advise the library and provide community service (Forum for Youth Investment, 2005). In New York City, the three public library systems and school libraries have partnered to create a joint summer reading program that includes booklists and activities for all age levels and outreach through an interactive summer reading website (Barber & Wallace, 2006).

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What recommendations will help public and school libraries design successful expanded learning time programs and services and work more effectively with afterschool and summer programs?

Based on the research and examples of expanded learning time programs in and with school and public libraries, a number of recommendations can be made to enhance the success of such programs.

Engage the entire community. Encourage a communitywide expectation that afterschool, weekend, and summer programs will work collaboratively with school and public libraries to offer children and youth an engaging set of library-related learning opportunities.

Form the programs around a youth development vision. Programs should be designed around the principles of youth development rather than the deficit model. Youth development principles include providing youth with choices, ensuring that they have opportunities to develop and express their own voice, strengthening their self-confidence by ensuring that they have successful experiences, providing opportunities for relationship building and socializing with friends, and focusing on learning.

Commit to funding, staff, and resources. Successful programs are integrated into the regular operation of the library, with a strong commitment to providing dedicated staff, resources, and ongoing funding. Appropriate books, technology, and other resources are important, but most important to participating youth are caring and energetic adults who provide guidance, support, and training and create a safe and welcoming environment.

Develop partnerships among school and public libraries, community agencies and schools that operate afterschool and summer programs, and businesses. Expanded learning time programs are most successful when they are developed and operated through partnerships because the various entities involved bring different areas of expertise and broader community support. Partnerships with community agencies, especially those operating or coordinating afterschool and summer programs, as well as local businesses, enable school and public libraries to design programs to serve the whole family and to customize aspects to fit the needs and interests of their local community. Programs that reach out to teens as well as younger children often include the teens themselves as partners in operating the program. As a result, teens develop important leadership and collaboration skills.

Foster innovative thinking that builds on the strengths of all partners. In order to take advantage of the unique strengths of each agency involved in planning afterschool and summertime library opportunities, library and community leaders need to open the lines of communication and creative thinking. Several strategies may help communities establish “innovation zones” where all ideas are welcomed and partnerships are built: Form advisory committees that bring together leaders in school and public libraries, afterschool programs, and community agencies to form plans and design programs; conduct focus groups and town halls to solicit creative ideas from diverse constituencies; provide mechanisms for community organizations to describe and offer their unique programs and expertise; and maintain an active outreach program to solicit new ideas and feedback from potential partners and contributors.

Provide meaningful activities in structured and welcoming environments. Teenagers enjoy opportunities that are both meaningful and enjoyable and expose them to potential careers, internships, and service to the library or in the community. Afterschool and summer learning programs should therefore be composed of multifaceted, enriching experiences involving reading and sharing, technology, education, the arts, imaginative problem solving, and creativity. By collaborating with youth-serving organizations that offer afterschool, weekend, and summer programs (for example, those that feature the arts, literacy, STEM, or sports and recreation), public and school libraries can add substantive and enriching activities, new expertise, and key resources to the mix for youth.

Advocate and plan for sustained support. In order to sustain support for expanded learning time programs and services, libraries must implement active advocacy efforts, reaching out to the youth they would like to serve, families in the community, community agencies and partners, local businesses, and government officials with messages about the importance of this programming for the community and the successes that youth have experienced through afterschool, weekend, and summer programs. As part of their partnership, school and public libraries and community-based organizations that offer afterschool and summer programming should align their services, build on each other's strengths, and promote each other. Library leaders should encourage foundations, local, state and federal officials to expand funding and support to library, school, afterschool and summer collaboration to expand offerings and the number of young people served.

Conclusion

Public and school libraries can, indeed, play an important role in providing environments and opportunities for young people to develop their strengths, pursue their interests, and express their own voices. Programs offered by libraries after school and during the summer can help struggling and disadvantaged young people catch up, keep up, and get ahead by giving them rich and meaningful learning experiences during those many hours when they are not in school. Partnerships among all agencies serving youth and their families—public libraries, school libraries, afterschool and summer programs, and schools—build an ecosystem of caring and enrichment that supports high levels of engagement and achievement for our youth.

For More Information

For additional examples of the types of expanded learning programs available to youth through school and public libraries, see the following websites:

Learning Opportunities, Careers

Chicago Public Library - www.chipublic.org/forteens/teensoptopics/jobscareers.php

Grand Island (NE) Senior High - http://www.theindependent.com/news/local/after-school-program-gives-students-time-for-homework-and-other/article_2e08f9b3-6c63-5809-b661-6c3723432643.html

Makerspaces in Libraries

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/tjmccue/2011/11/15/first-public-library-to-create-a-maker-space/>

<http://spotlight.macfound.org/blog/entry/Maker-Spaces-in-Libraries/>

<http://theunquietlibrarian.wordpress.com/2012/06/28/makerspaces-participatory-learning-and-libraries/>

The Arts

Denver Public Library: <http://kids.denverlibrary.org/fun/afterschool.html>

ASAP Theatre Works: <http://www.phillyasap.org/Drama.aspx>

Science

LEAP into Science: <http://www.fi.edu/leap/#how>

SciDentity: <http://scidentity.umd.edu/>

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