



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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Municipal Leadership Is Essential: Quality Afterschool Opportunities Strengthen Cities and Our Youth

Times have changed. In order for the United States and our cities to remain the beacons of hope they have been for the world, it is our responsibility to help our young people develop the skills and talents to find gainful employment and to attract businesses to our cities. Leaders across organizations and institutions, along with parents, have to work together toward the common goal of supporting our youth; no one should presume to take on this goal alone. There are too many social and economic challenges that affect outcomes for young people today that unfortunately make it so easy for many youth to take the wrong turn. As mayors and councilmembers, we have come to learn that in order to ensure that our young people get and stay on the right track, we have to get involved early and create opportunities throughout our communities to help them thrive. *Their success* is the success of our cities. Conversely, the unfortunate reality is that *their failure* is also our failure.

It is common knowledge that children spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school. While we agree that more can and should be done to educate our cities' youngest residents during the school day (and that cities have an important role to play in supporting educational efforts), most mayors do not control their school systems. We

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are in a unique position, though, to use our mayoral and council “bully pulpit” and leadership to enhance the options that children and youth have during that other 80% of time by creating high quality expanded learning opportunities in the afterschool hours, on weekends, and during summers.

Growing Municipal Support

Over the years, there has been a growing interest from municipal leaders in supporting afterschool efforts, as the National League of Cities documented in a recent report highlighting our four cities and 23 others (Spooner, 2011). Why? Because our charge as mayors and councilmembers is to keep our cities safe, spur economic growth, ensure a high quality of life, and provide access and opportunity for all. This is not always easy to do given the difficulties many of our communities face. Fortunately, there are many ways that afterschool and expanded learning opportunities can help city officials confront many pressing local challenges such as public safety, school attendance and truancy, low academic achievement and graduation rates, college and career preparation, civic engagement, hunger and obesity, and risky behaviors such as substance abuse and teen pregnancy. Our efforts to address these challenges are aligned with and supported by a strategy of providing resources and building partnerships to support afterschool programs.

City governments are essential partners with school districts and nonprofit organizations in supporting local youth. Many municipalities already provide a complement of opportunities to their young people via their parks and recreation departments, police athletic leagues, libraries, and museums. Often though, we have seen that communities take a siloed approach, with each program or department trying to solve challenges on its own rather than taking a more integrated approach in which partnerships with other city agencies, schools, and an array of nonprofit afterschool programs can have even greater impact. A powerful way to unite these programs is to include them as part of a citywide system of public, private, and community-based afterschool and expanded learning opportunities. Working together, community leaders can

- *improve the quality of programs,*
- *target programs and investments to youth most in need,*
- *provide joint training to providers from different organizations, and*
- *work collectively to increase participation rates.*

Citywide System Approach

Over the past decade, municipal leadership—and in particular, strong leadership by the mayor—has been a powerful catalyst for progress in the development of citywide systems of afterschool programming. As mayors and councilmembers, we have made afterschool a priority in our cities and have called upon our agency heads to work with school leaders and other youth-serving, community-based organizations to create, strengthen, or expand afterschool learning opportunities. Taking on such an effort is too heavy a burden for any one agency or organization alone; but working together as a group of passionate and committed leaders in a city, we are accomplishing amazing things for our youth.

Time and time again, we have seen how a high quality afterschool program can change a young person's life and how such programs can have a positive ripple effect on families and neighborhoods. Our desire is to substantially increase the number of young people across our cities who have access to and participate in a quality programs. We know that the more often a child comes to a program and the longer he or she stays engaged, the greater impact it will have on that child's life. Trying to scale up is not easy; it requires an intentional plan with focused goals and action steps developed with a number of key community and school partners.

Mayors and other city leaders are in a great position to begin these important conversations and to bring key partners to the table. These leaders may include school superintendents and other district officials, school board members, chiefs of police and other law enforcement officials, United Way executives, leaders of large and small nonprofit organizations, college and university representatives, chambers of commerce and the local business community, the philanthropic community, faith-based organizations, parents, and youth themselves. The mayor's and councilmembers' commitment to an issue can often inspire unlikely organizations to engage in a collective plan or communitywide system to support young people that can have more power and impact than individual efforts.

The key elements that make up such a system are committed leadership from multiple stakeholders, a coordinating entity to manage all of the moving parts, strong and reliable data, a focus on quality, thoughtful efforts to increase participation, and careful multiyear planning (Wallace Foundation, 2008). The purpose of using a comprehensive approach is to determine the programs we have in our community, their locations, the nature and level of demand from youth and their families, and the neighborhoods that lack afterschool opportunities. Then, we can target resources to ensure that young people have adequate and appropriate access to quality programs.

We are also developing standards to ensure all programs in our communities are of high quality and that providers and parents know what a quality program looks like. Additionally, we are coordinating professional training for program providers to help them support the developmental needs of young people. Perhaps most importantly, our cities are developing data management systems that track student participation in afterschool programs and give us information about their school attendance and behavior so that program staff can intervene and help where needed. This new ability to measure the impact of afterschool programs helps us ensure that our resources are well spent and allows us to communicate the importance of continued investment to our constituents.

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City Investments to Support Afterschool Are Worth It

Over the past decade the growth of federal funding provided through the U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative has helped cities across the country increase program slots and partner with schools and community-based organizations to develop comprehensive programming. While this has been an invaluable source of support for programs, the federal grants are time limited, and the resources are never enough to meet the demand. To augment these dollars, resources provided by cities, parents, nonprofits, and local philanthropies have made a big difference in meeting local demand for afterschool programs. We have to "put our money where our mouth is" if we hope for others to join us with their own resources as well.

Despite the extreme pressures on municipal budgets in these last several years, many of us have worked hard either to realign municipal funding, invest new dollars from city general funds, or at least hold the line to protect afterschool budgets. For example, in a flat budget environment, Nashville Mayor Karl Dean proposed one new initiative in his 2009 budget: resources for the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA) to implement a coordinated afterschool network that partners with a wide variety of neighborhood organizations to bring academic and enrichment opportunities to middle school youth. "There is tremendous need for afterschool programs for our middle school students—only 10% of our 21,000 middle schoolers participate in a structured after school program," Dean said at the time. "What we have learned over the last several months is that, in addition to need, there is tremendous interest from our students to be a part of these programs when they're offered. My goal is for NAZA to sustain the expansion and existence of neighborhood-based programs for the long-term."

In response, the Nashville Metro Council appropriated \$400,000 for the city's first Afterzone, then included an additional \$600,000 to launch the second in January 2011. The FY12 \$800,000 allocation seeded a third Zone, launched September 2012, with a fourth Zone on track for the 2013–14 school year. Mayor Dean appointed a director of afterschool initiatives in his office to manage the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the AfterZone rollout. Ronnie Steine, councilman-at-large, has been a long standing champion of afterschool in Nashville. He said, "In an environment of limited resources, one has to prioritize, and our city leadership understands we cannot back up for our young people. This means we have to support and nurture our youth when not in school so they can succeed in school."

Leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina, have also focused on the needs of middle school students and, in particular, have recognized that afterschool programs could be a deterrent to juvenile crime. Over a decade ago, councilmembers and school board leaders made a joint commitment to invest city and school dollars to launch three new middle school afterschool programs. Councilmember James E. Mitchell has had a steadfast commitment and passion for youth and has fought to keep funding alive for these programs, despite budget battles. Mitchell shared, "I am very proud of the Charlotte City Council's commitment to afterschool programs and to the success of our youth. The city now funds six different providers for a total of \$2.4 million dollars from our Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation." The city's former police chief also served as a critical champion for afterschool, underscoring the connection to keeping youth safe, and current Mayor Anthony Foxx has committed his support to afterschool and young people.

Resources to support afterschool can come from many different places. Since 2001, the city of Fort Worth has dedicated more than \$1.4 million annually to support afterschool programming in four school districts through partial proceeds from a one-half cent sales tax dedicated to a crime control and prevention district. Some of the tax revenue is used for afterschool programs because city leaders made a clear case that having afterschool programs is part of an overall crime prevention strategy. City partnerships with school districts can encourage additional commitments. Fort Worth Independent School District agreed to the joint creation of “Fort Worth After School,” using general operating funds to match \$1.1 million of the city’s commitment and employing staff to oversee the 84 school-based programs. Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants add \$4 million to afterschool programs. The city’s willingness to use voter-supported tax levies has resulted in a large pool of sustainable and flexible funding that puts the city in a strong position to lead afterschool system-building efforts. “We simply must invest in the future of our city, and that starts with giving every child the opportunity and tools they need to be successful in the classroom, and ultimately, in life,” said Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price. “We in Fort Worth are very proud of the bond between the city and the Fort Worth ISD to provide local children fun, healthy, productive and education-based alternatives to staying home alone. Now, thanks to our new Wallace Foundation grant, we’re very excited about the chance to take our afterschool system to a whole new level.”

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Aligning and making better use of existing resources in an era of tight budgets is another strategy. In-kind investments can sometimes be as important as financial resources. Creating joint-use agreements for city and school buildings, as well as shared maintenance of facilities, vehicles, parks, and athletic fields can open up more and better afterschool and summer opportunities. Sometimes the greatest need may be to identify a staff person to kick off a citywide effort and begin bringing multiple cross-sector partners to the table. No matter how much we galvanize other leaders across our community to invest time, resources, space, technology, training, and equipment, we cannot overlook how valuable the contribution of a passionate and knowledgeable staff person can be to lead a citywide system building effort.

For instance, in 2006, Saint Paul, Minnesota, Mayor Christopher Coleman formed the Second Shift Commission, a broad stakeholder group representing the city of Saint Paul, the Saint Paul Public Schools, and large and small community-based organizations, to figure out how to increase access to effective afterschool learning opportunities while creating a bridge to in-school learning. Mayor Coleman appointed his staff to lead the commission’s work. Their recommendations led to a new city-school-community partnership called Sprockets—a coordinating entity, structured as a citywide out-of-school-time network. Both the Sprockets director and data system project lead are housed in the city’s parks and recreation department and three staff are “on loan” from the YWCA of St. Paul and the Center for Democracy and Citizenship

at Augsburg College. The team focuses on improving quality, building a citywide data system, piloting shared learning programs between teachers and youth workers, and advancing a framework of youth success as learners, contributors, and navigators. In addition, Sprockets works with four neighborhood network teams of youth serving organizations that link youth development opportunities and services at the neighborhood level. Together, the Sprockets team is bringing the community's resources to bear on a comprehensive, citywide initiative. "Sprockets has quickly built a powerful set of tools and connections to youth-serving organizations to improve their programs and help youth develop essential life skills, confidence and experience," said Mayor Christopher B. Coleman, "This is exactly what I hoped would happen when I created the citizen commission several years ago. Sprockets is one of the keys to my vision of all youth succeeding in school and life."

What City Leaders Can Do

One of the most essential actions that municipal leaders can take to drive change is simply to convene key stakeholders to discuss the afterschool needs in the community. It may seem like an easy step, but it is an important one. Mayoral and councilmember champions can lead the charge and demonstrate the importance of the issue and identify the roles each partner can play towards a solution. Often the most challenging thing is getting the right folks to the table; once they are there, city leaders can lead the group in making a "to-do list" for each stakeholder.

A second useful step is to map the distribution of afterschool opportunities that exist across the community. Providing clear, visual evidence of the lack of accessible programs in certain neighborhoods can build public and political will for afterschool investments. Without the ability to present these data, local leaders often believe that their communities may have ample program options, when the reality may be that there is seriously inadequate or unequal distribution of programs across neighborhoods. Though a mapping process may take time to complete, this is a relatively easy "win" and can help generate a deeper understanding of the local afterschool landscape and help communicate needs more clearly to key community leaders.

Taking a citywide approach often fuels further progress and drives more strategic discussions about next steps. Early analyses of community resources and needs frequently reveal troubling gaps and spark efforts among key stakeholders to fill them. It is hard to say "no" or to turn away from a map that glaringly shows high crime or poverty in a neighborhood clearly lacking afterschool opportunities—and, in fact, it would not be right or politically savvy to do so. When we saw our community's needs, we knew we had to do something about it... and we have.

It's All Connected

Supporting afterschool programming is part of our education improvement strategy, economic development strategy, neighborhood development strategy, and crime prevention strategy. In short, it's all connected. When young people are engaged in positive activities, there are numerous positive outcomes. It is the job of municipal officials to make those connections. Ultimately, it is our job to support our children and youth as our communities' future. If you are a municipal official, we invite you to join us in expanding and improving afterschool opportunities in your own communities. If you

are a community organization leader, a parent, or a school leader, we urge you to ask your mayor and councilmembers to bring your community together to plan how to make afterschool a collaborative priority for the community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Saint Paul Mayor **Chris Coleman** has advocated for education, public safety, and economic development in his 6 years as mayor and for 6 years before that as a city councilmember. Prior to becoming an elected official, he spent 8 years as a county public defender and prosecutor and also worked in nonprofit finance. A champion of education, Mayor Coleman launched Sprockets, a citywide out-of-school-time network that developed the first data system of its kind in the state. His leadership in transportation led to the Central Corridor, the largest transit project in Minnesota history. He is currently 1st vice president of the National League of Cities.

Mayor **Karl Dean** is in his second term as Nashville's mayor. He has made education and youth, public safety and economic development his major priorities. Under his leadership, Nashville has dramatically lowered its truancy rate and increased its graduation rates. In 2011–2012, he served as co-chair of the National League of Cities Council on Youth, Education and Families.

James E. Mitchell, Jr., is a native of Charlotte, NC, where he has served on the Charlotte City Council since 1999 as the District 2 representative and as a vocal champion for afterschool and other youth opportunities. Mitchell is the immediate past president of the National League of Cities.

Mayor **Betsy Price** was elected mayor of Fort Worth June 18, 2011. Since then, she's been actively engaging the city's young people, working to create jobs, fighting for fiscal accountability and open government, building a citywide health and fitness initiative, and being a cheerleader for local public schools. A successful business owner for 17 years, Mayor Price began her career in public service as Tarrant County Tax Assessor in 2000 and quickly used her business experience to make her department one of the most efficient in Texas, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

Councilman-at-Large **Ronnie Steine** is a 17-year veteran of Nashville's Metro Council. In 2011–2012, he served as co-chair of the National League of Cities Council on Youth, Education and Families and currently serves on the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready By 21 National Leadership Council. He received the Afterschool Alliance's State Champion Award for Tennessee in 2010.

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